

MARK CARWARDINE



On the wild thoughts that won't let him sleep. This month:

The non-appliance of science

Why do government ministers repeatedly ignore good scientific advice – even when it's advice they paid for themselves?

The fiasco over badgers and bovine tuberculosis (bTB), where Defra blatantly snubbed the results of decades of research to order a cull, due to begin later this year, is one example.

Then, at the end of 2012, Defra announced that it planned to designate only 31 of the 127 Marine Conservation Zones recommended for English waters. According to The Wildlife Trusts, this goes against the advice of more than one million stakeholders in the marine environment – advice that was gathered at a cost of nearly £9m.

But fisheries ministers of EU member states are the worst of the lot. Analysis by WWF shows that, in the past nine years, they have ignored scientific advice in a mind-boggling 87 per cent of their decisions.

They repeatedly set fishing quotas that are far too high and continue to allow vast quantities of fish to be thrown overboard. The EU concedes that 88 per cent of European fish stocks are overexploited. Yet fisheries ministers don't have the guts to stand up to the interests of the fishing industry,

which is over-subsidised and over-sized in any case.

Our own fisheries minister, Richard Benyon, wants to over-ride restrictions on cod fishing, despite strong evidence that populations have not sufficiently recovered. With decisions like that being made, the North Sea cod recovery plan (and similar plans for other fish stocks) simply won't work.

The Common Fisheries Policy is currently under review. This could well be

There's nothing cod about cod science.



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the last chance to get it right, but I doubt that politicians are about to undergo a Damascene conversion.

How hard can it be? Without proper regulations there will be no fish, and without fish, no fishing. It's not rocket science.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, writer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter.