

MARK CARWARDINE



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

Another whaling nation...

The news we'd all been dreading finally came earlier this month. At the 64th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), South Korea announced that it plans to resume whaling. There are no details yet, but it will probably target minke whales in the Sea of Japan.

South Korea's government claims that it needs to kill whales (under a loophole in the IWC treaty that allows for so-called 'scientific whaling') to determine whale stocks. It's utter rubbish and nothing more than thinly veiled commercial whaling.

This group of minkes is already classified as Endangered by the IWC Scientific Committee and, of course, whales don't have to be killed to fill gaps in research data. Indeed, South Korea conducted a 'scientific' hunt of minke whales in 1986, which yielded no relevant data.

The truth is that South Korea's government is under pressure from its fishermen, who claim that whales are eating 'their' fish – never mind the fact that stocks are declining because of mismanagement and overfishing. As Greenpeace aptly puts it: "Blaming whales for declining fish populations is like blaming woodpeckers for deforestation."

But it gets worse. These are the same fishermen who

routinely snare whales in their fishing nets. They say it's accidental, but I don't believe them. Whale meat can be sold for high prices in South Korean markets and restaurants and, surprise surprise, the so-called 'bycatch' is suspiciously high.

We've already hunted many whale populations to near extinction and now they face more threats than ever, including ship strikes, chemical and noise pollution, oil and gas exploration,



Like Japan, South Korea will probably hunt minke whales.

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climate change and entanglement in fishing gear.

But this is much more than a conservation or animal welfare issue. I believe it's an ethical and moral issue. Quite simply, we shouldn't be killing whales. Can't some things be sacrosanct?

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