



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

Just when you think things can't get any worse, they do. I'm still in shock after hearing about a preposterous plan to legalise commercial whaling for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century.

The proposal has been drafted during secret talks between 12 members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). It is a ridiculous effort to relieve the near-deadlock between pro-conservation and pro-whaling countries. Essentially, it's trying to make friends with Japan, Norway and Iceland, who make a mockery of the 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling by using loopholes in IWC regulations to kill nearly 2,000 whales every year.

The draft plan suggests legalising commercial whaling for the next 10 years. The purported aim is to bring whaling back under the control of the IWC. Currently, it has no say over quotas for whaling thinly disguised as 'scientific research' or conducted under an objection to the moratorium, so Japan, Norway and Iceland simply kill as many whales as they want.

But the plan flies in the face of world opinion and scientific advice. It ignores the existence of the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, which is supposed to protect whales in a critical feeding area, and would force anti-whaling nations to set quotas for hunts that they believe should not exist.

At first glance, there are some positive aspects to the plan. It would limit whaling (apart from subsistence hunts) to the three countries already hunting whales, for example, and would increase efforts to safeguard depleted whale populations. But to be honest, these days I am so sceptical of everything about the IWC that all I can see is a whopping great smokescreen.

The moratorium on whaling should have been one of the greatest conservation victories of all time, but it is failing unequivocally to protect whales. Now the IWC is treading on even more dangerous ground. How can it even consider putting us on the verge of a return to legitimate commercial whaling? Surely, in the 21st century, we are better than that?



The misapplication of science: also known as commercial whaling.

I'm in shock after hearing about a preposterous plan to legalise commercial whaling for the first time in a quarter of a century.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and tv presenter. Read about his new series on the Natural History Museum on p61.