



# MARK CARWARDINE WILD THOUGHTS

Iceland should not be allowed to join the EU unless it stops whaling. This summer, it killed no fewer than 125 fin whales and 79 minke whales. All commercial whaling is bad, but killing fin whales – which the IUCN officially classifies as ‘Endangered’ – is about as bad as it gets.

Iceland’s economy took a battering when its banking sector and currency collapsed in 2008, so this island nation of 320,000 people sees the EU and the Euro currency as a way to stabilise its economy. But it had the audacity to put in a formal application to join while it was in the middle of the whale hunt.

It breaks my heart to say this (I have many friends in Iceland), but why should we help them to rebuild their damaged economy while they continue to hunt whales?

I have no doubt at all that the thorny issue of fishing quotas is likely to form part of the EU negotiations, so it’s not unreasonable to suggest that whaling should be a sticking point, too.

Besides, for a country to be recognised as a suitable candidate, it must fulfil the first of the Copenhagen criteria: it must be a politically stable democracy that respects human rights. It’s not such a big stretch to demand respect for animal rights as well.

But I’m not holding out much hope. A few weeks ago, 26 governments made an official protest and called on the Icelandic Government to end commercial

whaling. Among them were 12 EU member states, including Sweden and the UK. Yet Sweden, which currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, has announced that it would prioritise Iceland’s EU accession process – and the UK has already declared its support.

My guess is that most European politicians would be too embarrassed to make a real issue over whaling. If they did, how then would the Spanish explain bullfighting, the French the production of *foie gras* or, for that matter, the UK our millions of battery-farmed chickens? At least, I suppose, bulls, geese and hens aren’t endangered.



**Should Iceland’s whaling policy keep it out of the EU?**

**I have many friends in Iceland, but why should we help them to rebuild their economy when they continue to hunt whales?**

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and tv presenter, and will be presenting a series about the Natural History Museum next year.