

MY WAY OF THINKING

MARK CARWARDINE

The broadcaster and campaigner reacts to Japan's decision to resume commercial whaling, and invites your thoughts on the subject.

This was the news we had been dreading. After umpteen threats over almost as many years, Japan has left the International Whaling Commission (IWC). In blatant defiance of world opinion – not to mention the 1986 global ban on commercial whaling – it will resume commercial whaling in its own waters from July 2019.

In a pathetic and contemptible attempt to minimise the inevitable international outrage, it simultaneously pledged that it will end its so-called 'scientific whaling' in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary in the Antarctic. The fact that several hundred Antarctic minke whales will be saved from explosive harpoons every year is marvellous news, of course. But it is not out of the goodness of Japanese hearts.

In 2014, the International Court of Justice ruled that Japan's 'scientific whaling' is nothing more than commercial whaling in disguise, and deemed it illegal. Japan blatantly ignored its ruling to stop. But now it is obliged to stop under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which makes every nation legally bound to work through 'the appropriate international organisations' for marine mammal management in international waters. In this case, the appropriate international organisation is the IWC – so, by leaving, Japan has shot itself in the foot.

Meanwhile, its arguments for killing whales are utter nonsense. It is not true that whaling is an important part of Japanese culture (and, besides,

slavery was once part of our culture, but we have grown up). It is certainly not true that the Japanese rely on whale meat to survive (there is already a mountain of 5,000 tonnes of unwanted frozen whale meat in Japan – which isn't surprising given that the Japanese eat an average of one minuscule ounce of whale meat per person per year). It is also not true that Japan has the 'right' to kill its own whales (they roam the oceans, ignoring political boundaries, and therefore belong to everyone and no one).

Even if these arguments were true, there is still no way to kill a whale humanely at sea – whaling is so cruel that it should be banned on animal welfare grounds alone.

Nonetheless, Japan will be operating unilaterally – deciding which whale

“There's a worry that other countries may be emboldened by Japan's precedent and begin whaling themselves.”

species and how many to kill – while the rest of us have absolutely no say in the matter. Meanwhile, there's a worry that other countries, such as South Korea and Russia, may be emboldened by Japan's shameful precedent and begin slaughtering whales themselves.

The decision says a lot about Japan – it has simply gone rogue. But what is most frustrating is that it doesn't really care about whales or whaling. This is all about saving face. Japan won't back down under international pressure – whaling, quite simply, is a matter of principle. It would be laughable if it wasn't so abhorrent.

We've already killed millions of great whales and many species have never recovered from the slaughter. To make matters worse, the survivors now face a greater number of threats today than at any time in their past – everything from drowning in fishing nets and ingestion of plastics to noise pollution and climate change. The Yangtze River dolphin is already extinct and it is quite possible that, without proper protection, we could lose several more whale, dolphin and porpoise species in the next few years. Now, more than ever, they need all the help they can get.

It absolutely beggars belief that we are still having to battle against such a cruel, outdated and unnecessary industry as commercial whaling after all this time. 🐋

MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? If you want to support Mark in his views or shoot him down in flames, email wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk



A Japanese whaling ship injures a whale with a harpoon before drowning it.