

# MARK CARWARDINE



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

## Our throwaway society

**P**athetic. That's the only word for a recent report by a committee of MPs on proposals to ban the practice of discarding fish.

Throwing away 'unwanted' fish overboard is a consequence of the crazy EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). When fishermen exceed their quota, catch species for which they don't have a quota, or catch fish that are smaller than the minimum size allowed, they throw them away. It's an environmental crime of astonishing proportions – half the fish caught in the North Sea alone are being thrown overboard as a result.

At last, the EU is now proposing an outright ban on commercial fish discards to begin in 2014. But our MPs want to delay any ban until at least 2020. They claim they need more information, but they simply lack the nerve to rewrite the CFP (even though it clearly doesn't work – just look at the current state of the European fishing industry).

The problem is that a discard ban on its own would be the fishing equivalent of carbon offsetting or recycling: it wouldn't tackle the root cause of the problem.

The priority must be to stop unwanted fish being caught in the first place, by using more selective fishing gear, introducing more seasonal restrictions and

focusing on catches rather than landings. We should also develop new markets by encouraging the public to develop an appetite for less valued fish species and accept that the finer details need to be addressed on a fishery-by-fishery basis.

Total discard bans already exist in several countries. Norway is currently celebrating the 25th anniversary of its own discard ban and, since Norwegian fisheries are



“*Half the fish caught in the North Sea are being thrown overboard through discarding.*”

some of the healthiest and most prosperous in the world, it clearly works for both fish and fishermen.

It's scary – and if we can't take a firm stand on discards, what hope is there for tackling the far greater problem of overfishing?

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