

# MARK CARWARDINE



## REAL KILLERS ON THE HIGH SEAS

According to the latest UN figures, a staggering 640,000 tonnes of fishing nets, lines and traps are abandoned, lost and discarded in the world's oceans every year. This 'ghost fishing gear' floats around in the sea entangling, injuring, mutilating, drowning and killing literally millions of animals every year.

The gear eventually sinks under the weight of all those dead and dying whales, dolphins, seals, turtles, seabirds, sharks and other wildlife. But as their bodies decompose, it floats back up to wreak havoc all over again. And, since modern synthetic materials can remain active in the water for decades or even centuries, it's a never-ending cycle.

But asking the fishing industry to take responsibility is like asking the environment secretary to look after an injured badger. Notorious for its catastrophic mismanagement of fish stocks around the world, and pampered by insane and inept governments that blatantly ignore all scientific advice while actively encouraging fishermen to wipe out

one stock after another, it doesn't give a damn.

World Animal Protection, together with other conservation groups and everyone from marine biologists to whale-watch operators, is trying to work with the fishing industry and governments to solve the problem. The priority is to stop gear being abandoned or lost in the first place (or replace it with biodegradable materials).

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But we must also continue to remove abandoned gear and intensify efforts to rescue animals that get caught. Much relies on the hope that there are people in the fishing industry with a conscience.

In the meantime, I'd mark every single net, line and trap with a digital marker. Every time one is found abandoned, full of dead and dying wildlife, the owner responsible would get a knock on the door and a fine. Perhaps we should confiscate their boats, too. Maybe then they would sit up and take notice?