



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
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науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2001, aims to enable States to more effectively protect their underwater cultural heritage.

What is Underwater Cultural Heritage?

Art. 1 paragraph 1 of the 2001 Convention defines underwater cultural heritage as all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water for at least 100 years.

This definition includes ancient shipwrecks, like the *Mary Rose* wreck in Portsmouth, UK, the remains of the Armada of Philipp II of Spain or the ships of Christopher Columbus, as well as submerged buildings such as the Alexandria Lighthouse, undersea rock art caves, Cenotes or Neolithic lakeside villages. This definition does however not encompass installations still in operation.

Underwater cultural heritage can provide testimony to many important historic events and represents an invaluable source of information on ancient civilizations and historic seafaring. It also offers unique diving and tourism opportunities.

In recent times such heritage has become increasingly threatened. Many submerged archaeological sites are pilaged without recourse to scientific and

archaeological exploration methods leading to the irretrievable loss of our common heritage.

The destruction of the *Tek Sing* and the *Geldermalsen* off Indonesia, as well as the plundering of the remains of Morgan's fleet off the Isle à Vache close to Haiti, are only three of the better known cases.

The 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage

The 2001 Convention represents the response of the international community to the increasing looting and destruction of underwater cultural heritage.

It is an autonomous treaty aimed exclusively at the protection of such heritage.

The 2001 Convention neither changes the sovereignty rights of States nor regulates the ownership of cultural property.

The goals of the Convention are to obtain comprehensive protection for underwater cultural heritage wherever it is located and to harmonize its protection with that of heritage on land.



Wreck, Italy© A. Vanzo /UNESCO

The UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage

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Shipwreck Papua-New-Guinea © A. Vanzo /UNESCO

The Convention sets out basic principles for the protection of underwater cultural heritage, provides a detailed State cooperation system, and provides widely recognized practical Rules for the treatment and research of underwater cultural heritage.

States Parties to the Convention undertake to: preserve underwater cultural heritage; to recognize its preservation *in situ* as a preferred option; and ban its commercial exploitation and dispersal.

The Convention encourages training and information sharing and responsible public access.

The 2001 Convention will enter into force three months after the deposit of the 20th instrument of ratification. As 16 States have ratified the Convention to date, its entry into force is forthcoming. It is therefore opportune to explain the context and content of the Convention as well as the challenges of its implementation.

Information documents available:

Information Brochure (En / Fr / S)
Posters, Flyers
Frequently Asked Questions
(En/Fr/S)
Film (CD ROM – En/Fr)

See for Background:

www.unesco.org/culture/en/underwater
www.unesco.org/culture/en/underwater/convention

These challenges include not only the organization of the first meeting of States Parties and the preparation of the (optional) Technical Advisory Body, but also the implementation of the State Cooperation System proposed by the 2001 Convention.

Operational issues to be considered remain the persistent problem of the commercial exploitation of underwater heritage and the insufficient awareness of its significance. A foremost task for the future will be capacity-building and the elimination of the vast differences in technical progress in the various States (well-equipped treasure hunters versus the governments of developing States).

Delegations as well as colleagues at HQ and in the Field are encouraged to submit questions before the session by email.

The session will be organized with the participation of the Assistant Director-General for Culture, Mme Françoise Rivière.

Focal Point for the 2001 Convention:

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