

UNESCO 2001 Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention Summary



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CMAS

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage is an international convention adopted in 2001 with the primary objective of protecting and promoting underwater cultural heritage and combating the extensive pillage, commercial exploitation, and illicit and/or unethical traffic of this heritage worldwide. UNESCO and CMAS have an agreement* in June 2023 to carry out common projects in order to disseminate the principles and ethics of this Convention, to promote cooperation, and to strengthen collaboration, especially in training and awareness-raising.



Summary of the key points of this convention:

1. Definition of underwater cultural heritage: The convention defines underwater cultural heritage as any trace of human existence that has been underwater and has historical or cultural value. This includes shipwrecks, underwater archaeological sites, submerged objects and other underwater cultural items.
2. Importance of protection: The convention recognizes the importance of underwater cultural heritage as an integral part of the cultural heritage of humanity and highlights its historical, archaeological, scientific and cultural value.
3. Principles of protection: The convention establishes fundamental principles for the protection of underwater cultural heritage, including in situ preservation wherever possible, responsible scientific and archaeological research, and international cooperation in its protection.
4. Responsibility of States: States that are parties to the convention

have the responsibility to take measures to protect and preserve underwater cultural heritage within their jurisdictional waters and under their flag. They must also prevent and combat the illicit trafficking of these elements.

5. International cooperation: The convention promotes international cooperation in the protection of underwater cultural heritage. States undertake to share information and knowledge, as well as to collaborate in the training of professionals in this field.
6. Registration and notification: States must maintain a register of underwater cultural heritage sites in their territory and notify UNESCO of any planned exploration or excavation activities. This allows for proper supervision and coordination.
7. Fight against illicit trafficking: The convention prohibits the sale and trade of stolen or illegally obtained underwater cultural heritage. States commit to taking legal and enforcement measures to prevent illicit trafficking and recover stolen items.



The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage is an international treaty designed to promote the protection and preservation of underwater cultural heritage throughout the world, encouraging cooperation between States and combating illicit trafficking in these valuable cultural elements. Each State Party and many of the other countries who are not ratified yet adhere to the initiative and create their own regulations. The Federations must be aware of and promote these local regulations and thus cooperate in the protection of underwater cultural heritage. To care for and preserve underwater cultural heritage, it is essential that divers follow good practices and responsible behavior guidelines. Remember that underwater cultural heritage is a fragile and valuable resource that belongs to humanity. Taking care of it is the responsibility of all lovers of diving and underwater history.

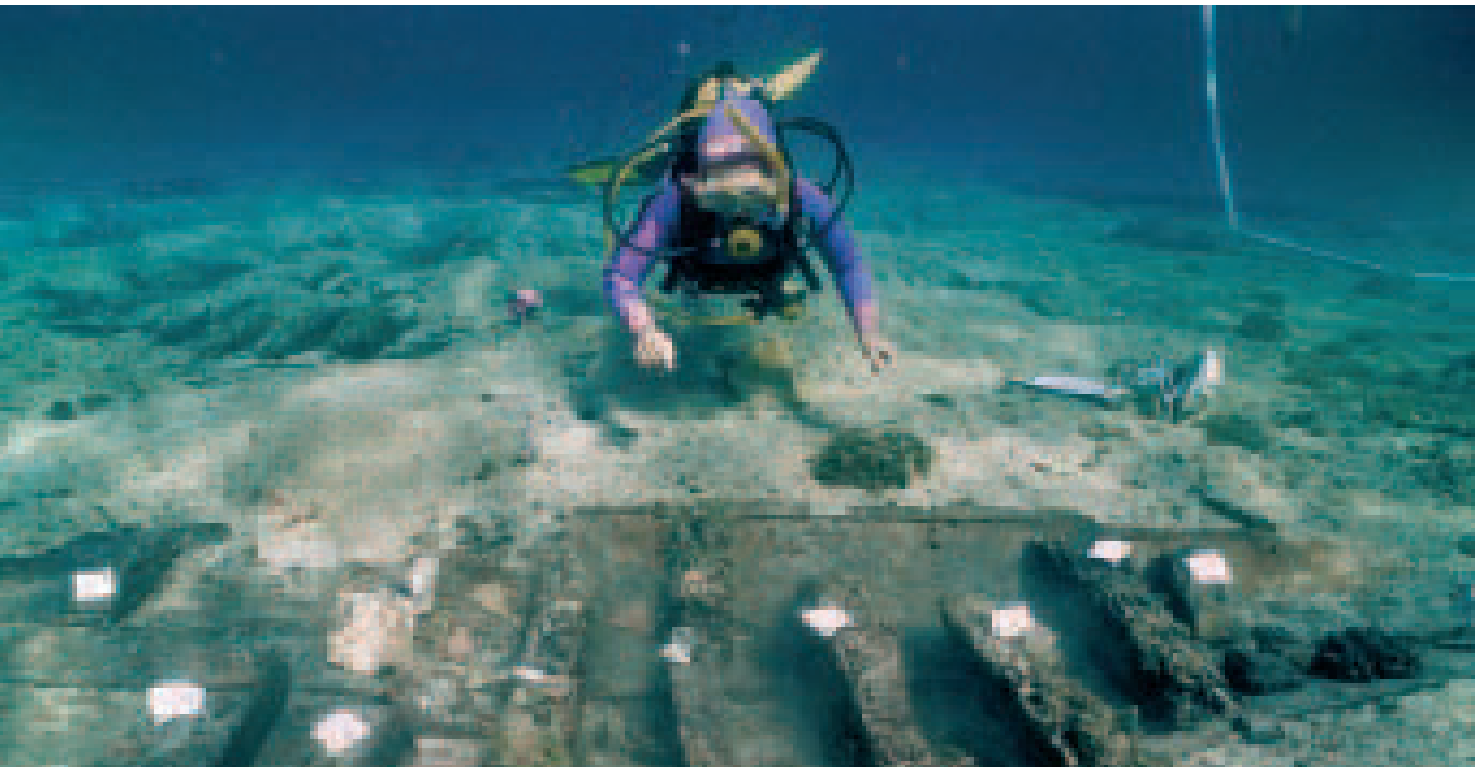
UNESCO Code of Ethics for Diving on Submerged Archaeological Sites

Historical shipwrecks, sunken archaeological objects, and other submerged archaeological sites are increasingly exposed to damage by inexperienced or unaware divers. To ensure worldwide respect for submerged heritage by individual divers CMAS supports to UNESCO Code of Ethics for Diving on Submerged Archaeological Sites. They are:

- 1. Protect underwater cultural heritage for future generations.** Underwater cultural heritage encompasses all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character, lying under water. Over the centuries, thousands of ships, entire cities, and even landscapes have been swallowed by the waves. They constitute a precious heritage that needs to be protected.
- 2. Leave wrecks and submerged ruins untouched.** The site of a wreck or a submerged ruin is historically important. When objects or any other kind of remains are displaced without prior scientific recording they are deprived of their context and lose part of their significance, they also risk deterioration in drying and their extraction, without appropriate conservation can already lead to their disappearance. Sites should therefore remain untouched by divers, not involved in a scientific archaeological project.



3. **Obey legal protection of archaeological sites.** Many underwater heritage sites are protected by the law. Know and understand the applicable regulations before you dive to prevent you breaking the law.
4. **Seek permission to dive on designated sites.** Diving on designated wreck or ruin sites often requires a specific permission. Do not dive them without a licence, when it is required, as you may put the site or yourself in danger. Do also respect official directives concerning the limitation of diving in certain zones.
5. **Only archaeologists may remove objects.** Non-scientific diving should remain non-destructive and non-intrusive. Do not move or recover objects other than in the framework of an official archaeological excavation and under the supervision of a professional archaeologist authorized by the competent authorities.



6. **Do not take souvenirs.** Dive to enjoy and / or to get involved. Take photographs or document the site (if the national regulations allow). However, do not take any object from a wreck or submerged ruin and do not disturb the site. You would destroy the historic context and damage the object when brought to the surface.
7. **Respect measures that protect sites.** Any protection measure (metal cages, sand layers, sonar buoys), placed over submerged archaeological sites by the responsible authorities safeguard them from erosion, irresponsible intruders and looting. They should be respected. Even if you take nothing away – any damage that you do to a protection device opens the way to damage to the site. If you note any damage done to such a device, report it to the authorities.

- 8. Report discoveries to the responsible authorities.** If you do discover an historic wreck or site do not spread the word. Immediately contact the national competent authorities, who will advise you about the next steps. If your find is important it may be researched or designated a protected site.
- 9. Hand over objects that you took.** Should you have taken an object from a submerged archaeological site to protect it from extreme risk of loss report it to the competent national authority as soon as possible. If ever you discover an ancient object in the water or at a beach, which is under the threat of private appropriation or damage, contact the competent authority. If this is not possible, then recover it and hand it over to the nearest authority. It can indicate the presence of an archaeological site off the coast and give information about it.
- 10. Do not sell our common heritage.** Objects coming from a submerged archaeological site should not be commercially traded, but protected. We can learn much about the development of civilisations and our own past from the remains of wrecks and ruins under water. Dispersing this heritage robs us of our past. If you note the sale of illegally acquired artefacts, notify the competent authorities.
- 11. Document discovered sites.** If you discover a wreck or submerged ruin document (photos, drawings or notes) its precise location and its state. Make a report about it and accompany it by your documentation. (Please do it in the frame of the regulations of your country. Don't forget you are NOT an underwater archaeologist and you can do it only when you see them by chance)



12. Be careful when taking photographs. When taking photographs, be careful to avoid contact with the wreck or ruin site. A camera is not a licence to move or disturb cultural heritage. Many objects are fragile regardless of size. Improper techniques while taking photos under water can damage sensitive site elements and harm fragile objects with the bump of a camera or tank, swipe of a fin or even the touch of a hand. Camera systems may add weight or be buoyant. Make sure to secure equipment and be properly weighted to avoid contact damage.

13. Stay safe. Diving wrecks or ruins can be dangerous. Respect safety and health requirements appropriate to the sites in question. Pay attention to depth, time and currents and do not enter into cavities without taking highest safety precautions. Do never dive unaccompanied. Preferably dive only accompanied by a professional and qualified guide and gather information beforehand. Avoid harming marine life and do not leave trash or equipment debris in the waterç



14. Be a role model. Be a role model for other divers and non-divers when diving submerged heritage sites. Encourage other divers to follow this Code of Ethics. Help create conservation awareness amongst the local community, general public and divers.

15. Support ratification and compliance with the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.



**The agreement have been prepared by Krista Pikkat and Dr. Ulrike Guerin from UNESCO and Dr. Hakan Öniz from CMAS and signed by Ernesto Ottone R. from UNESCO and Francisco Alberto Lacase from CMAS on June 14, 2023 in UNESCO Center, Fontenoy-Paris*

Photos: "The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage."

Page 1 and 6: A. Vanzo © UNESCO. Taiwanese wreck, Coral Sea.

Page 2: Drassm/Ifremer © UNESCO. France, Amphorae at great depth, Arles 4, 1st century A.D.

Page 3: E. Trainito © UNESCO. Italy, wreck located in Baia Salinedda, Sardinia, 3rd century. AD

Page 4: E. Trainito © UNESCO. Umbria Wreck, Wingate Reef, Port Sudan.

Page 5: E. Trainito © UNESCO. Italy, wreck located in Porto San Paolo, 3rd century. AD

Page 7: A. Vanzo © UNESCO. Togo wreck.

Page 8: E. Trainito © UNESCO. Umbria Wreck, Wingate Reef, Port Sudan.