

## THE CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE

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The Convention was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 2 November 2001. The reasons for its elaboration and adoption were among others the large scale destruction of submerged archaeological sites by commercial treasure-hunters, but also by industrial activities incidentally affecting this heritage. This produced a desire to harmonize the protection of underwater cultural heritage with that already accorded to land-based heritage.

The 2001 Convention entered into force on 2 January 2009. It has been ratified by over 40 States on the date of its tenth anniversary, on 2 November 2011. Many others already apply its guidelines in practice. Therewith it has over the years become the foremost international treaty concerning submerged heritage.

The Convention does strengthen legal protection, cooperation, awareness-raising and capacity-building and grants protection to all submerged cultural heritage. Its interest is that it achieves legal protection wherever a submerged archaeological site is located, i.e. also in international waters. Moreover it enables States Parties to adopt a common approach to preservation and ethical scientific management. States Parties will benefit from cooperation with other States Parties in practical and legal terms. Its importance for heritage professionals is however also that it provides effective professional guidelines on how to intervene with and to research underwater cultural heritage sites.

It can be expected that the Convention will over time be ratified universally and that it will put an end to the brutal treasure-hunting and destruction that is currently menacing major submerged archaeological sites. The Convention as well as its Scientific

and Technical Advisory Body can also be expected to in future strongly influence the discipline of underwater archaeology and raise the public awareness about the importance of submerged heritage.

The present scientific colloquium celebrates the anniversary of the 2001 Convention. It is hoped that it will foster its understanding and implementation.