Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage

adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO
at its 31st session, Paris, 2 November 2001

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Paris from 15 October to 3 November 2001, at its thirty-first session,

Acknowledging the importance of underwater cultural heritage as an integral part of the cultural heritage of humanity and a particularly important element in the history of peoples, nations, and their relations with each other concerning their common heritage,

Realizing the importance of protecting and preserving the underwater cultural heritage and that responsibility therefore rests with all States,

Noting growing public interest in and public appreciation of underwater cultural heritage,

Convinced of the importance of research, information and education to the protection and preservation of underwater cultural heritage,

Convinced of the public’s right to enjoy the educational and recreational benefits of responsible non-intrusive access to in situ underwater cultural heritage, and of the value of public education to contribute to awareness, appreciation and protection of that heritage,

Aware of the fact that underwater cultural heritage is threatened by unauthorized activities directed at it, and of the need for stronger measures to prevent such activities,

Conscious of the need to respond appropriately to the possible negative impact on underwater cultural heritage of legitimate activities that may incidentally affect it,

Deeply concerned by the increasing commercial exploitation of underwater cultural heritage, and in particular by certain activities aimed at the sale, acquisition or barter of underwater cultural heritage,

Aware of the availability of advanced technology that enhances discovery of and access to underwater cultural heritage,

Believing that cooperation among States, international organizations, scientific institutions, professional organizations, archaeologists, divers, other interested parties and the public at large is essential for the protection of underwater cultural heritage,

Considering that survey, excavation and protection of underwater cultural heritage necessitate the availability and application of special scientific methods and the use of suitable

* Not yet entered into force.
techniques and equipment as well as a high degree of professional specialization, all of which indicate a need for uniform governing criteria,


Committed to improving the effectiveness of measures at international, regional and national levels for the preservation in situ or, if necessary for scientific or protective purposes, the careful recovery of underwater cultural heritage,

Having decided at its twenty-ninth session that this question should be made the subject of an international convention,

Adopts, this second day of November 2001, this Convention.

**Article 1. Definitions**

For the purposes of this Convention:

1. (a) ‘Underwater cultural heritage’ means all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years, such as:
   (i) sites, structures, buildings, artefacts and human remains, together with their archaeological and natural context;
   (ii) vessels, aircraft, other vehicles or any part thereof, their cargo or other contents, together with their archaeological and natural context; and
   (iii) objects of prehistoric character.
   
   (b) Pipelines and cables placed on the seabed shall not be considered as underwater cultural heritage.
   
   (c) Installations other than pipelines and cables, placed on the seabed and still in use, shall not be considered as underwater cultural heritage.

2. (a) ‘States Parties’ means States which have consented to be bound by this Convention and for which this Convention is in force.

   (b) This Convention applies, mutatis mutandis, to those territories referred to in Article 26, paragraph 2(b), which become Parties to this Convention in accordance with the conditions set out in that paragraph, and to that extent ‘States Parties’ refers to those territories.


4. ‘Director-General’ means the Director-General of UNESCO.