

Written evidence submitted by the Heritage Alliance

[The Heritage Alliance](#) is England's largest coalition of independent heritage interests, bringing together over 200 organisations, which contain over 7 million members, volunteers, trustees, and staff. The Heritage Alliance sits on the Government's Heritage Council, and on the heritage sector's Historic Environment Forum. In our recently published [Heritage Manifesto](#), we outlined several policy and fiscal priorities for supporting the UK heritage sector and maximising its benefits for communities and the environment. Our members include several expert organisations with an interest in the marine environment ranging from the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee to archaeological organisations such as CBA and Cifa and a large range of mobile heritage organisations including UK Historic Ships, Maritime Heritage Trust and others. You will, no doubt, receive more in-depth responses from some of these organisations and our response is intended to complement these – flagging some issues and opportunities in relation to the marine historic environment.

General Comments

Maritime heritage and archaeology contribute to the prosperity of the UK in different forms. They contribute to coastal areas' economies (through archaeological investigations and tourism) but also provide social benefits to local communities. The growth and regeneration of coastal communities – an area of cross-party interest – alongside priorities for sustainable energy infrastructure, including in the marine environment (which will open up new opportunities for research alongside some risks for marine heritage), are important areas for consideration.

Maritime heritage is a resource that needs to be protected and celebrated, for its own sake and for its contribution to national and local history as well as the economy, society and the environment. Protecting heritage also importantly safeguards biodiversity as wrecks also provide, for instance, an ideal habitat for many fish species.

The history of the relationship between people, fisheries and the marine environment is fundamental thread throughout British history. Our heritage is a tangible link between local communities and their history. The physical consequences of this history frame the distinctive character and identity of so many of our historic ports and communities around the coast. Indeed, it is hard to envision the future of the UK's marine sector – without conjuring up images of this vital past. This connects environmental obligations with other important commitments such as the recently ratified Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage – occupied with customs and practices.

One of the UK's great strengths both at home and abroad over the last 50 years is the leading role that it has played in marine archaeology. Wonderful things have been discovered and explored, and the UK remains at the forefront of international practice in marine archaeological investigation and innovative public engagement. Maritime heritage sites attract thousands of visitors and contribute millions of pounds to coastal economies. A sense of history also pervades many people's enjoyment of the coast, where heritage provides an important tangible setting within which wellbeing and other social benefits accrue. Maritime heritage, both at the coast and under the sea, already makes a major contribution to the UK and could contribute more as we head into the next phase of our country's history. For all that has been achieved, the potential gains are far greater. Realising this potential requires that Government does not inadvertently detract from our valuable sea-going legacy and instead takes some modest steps to make the most of our maritime heritage as we go forward as part of a wider environmental agenda.

Some Areas of Opportunity

As an island with rich marine and coastal heritage, we can further safeguard our unique historic environment, alongside the natural environment, by:

- Ratifying the UNESCO convention on the protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage as a framework for protecting UK interests in historic shipwrecks in international waters and the territorial waters of other countries. As a nation we follow the principles of the Annex but formal ratification is long overdue;
- Extending the Memorandum of Understanding that exists between DCMS and the MOD on underwater cultural heritage and wreck management to other relevant government departments for effective collaboration – these include DEFRA, MHCLG and DfT. This would ensure better strategic consideration and collaboration between the various departments with a hand in the management of marine cultural heritage;
- The Protection of Wrecks Act celebrated its 50 years in force last year. It has been an important piece of legislation and is ready for review and update to ensure it is as effective as possible into the future. Cifa and partners led a conference on the topic and are producing a report analysing the Act's performance over the last 50 years and to identify opportunities which would strengthen its provisions or address its omissions;
- Enabling statutory protection of significant submerged prehistoric features, sites and artefacts, many of which have been discovered in the course of fishing and other activities. This could be achieved, as it has been in Scotland, with a small legislative amendment to allow for designation of sites without structure – a tweak we also want to see for terrestrial sites in England. These sites are significant but limited in number;

- Recognised weaknesses in heritage protection in the marine environment could be overcome through the introduction of Historic Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as has occurred in Scotland;
- Although progress on creating a series of MPAs around the UK is laudable, the failure to address the historic environment within MPAs to date is a major missed opportunity. The Government should enable the conservation objectives of MPAs to include objectives for heritage assets lying within their extents; consideration of the historic environment should be integrated within MPA implementation and monitoring, including survey and research; and heritage should be addressed as a valued attribute of the marine environment in the designation of future MPAs.

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