Australia and Pacific countries: 
The need to collaborate to protect underwater cultural heritage

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Abstract

Of the 60 States who have ratified the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage to date, only three States in the Asia-Pacific Region have done so. The Convention is the international framework for working collaboratively to protect our shared underwater cultural heritage resource. This paper looks briefly at the three States in the Asia-Pacific Region who have ratified the Convention, the status of some Pacific Island States in regard to ratification of the Convention and in detail at the history of Australia’s consideration of ratification of the Convention. Further, the paper highlights global cultural and environmental threats to underwater cultural heritage and raises the need for immediate closer collaboration by all Pacific Island States and countries that border the Pacific to protect underwater cultural heritage regardless of their status of ratification.

Key words: Australia, Pacific Island States, collaboration, ratification, underwater cultural heritage.

Introduction

Underwater cultural heritage (UCH), particularly shipwrecks, prepares us to look beyond the recent historical confines of a country’s borders, to see the interconnected nature of all people and the environment. Shipwrecks connect us to each other in tangible ways, as evidence of a worldwide web of interaction. These physical proofs of the past show the wonderful complexity of life, discovery, occupation and trade.

Ships were, until the age of flight, the most complex machines humans made. Ships were also often multi-national affairs. Made in one country with materials from many countries; registered in another country; operated by a crew comprising multiple ethnic backgrounds; and functioned to travel to other places. At no time in our past has the physical underwater archaeological assemblage, documenting the age of discovery and the rise of the global economy, been so threatened by human activity, such as illegal salvage and coastal development.

Human activity is not the only threat to underwater and all other heritage. It is a firmly established fact that climate is changing beyond our ‘expectations of normal’. Temperatures are rising; storm intensities are recorded as increasing in rate and strength with a host of associated impacts to heritage. Change to archaeology is occurring at the level of the microscopic microbial (Hollesen et al. 2017, p. 94) to the macroscopic terra-forming (Jensen 2017, p. 131; Benlloch et al. 2017, p. 81; Dawson et al. 2017, pp. 23-25; Lopez-Romero et al. 2017, pp. 73-74; Palsdottir & Feeley 2017, p. 102). People may choose to argue whether anthropogenic activity has contributed to climate change, but for the individual who lives in proximity to the sea the...
words ‘climate change’ conjure images of rising sea level, floods, higher storm surges and large scouring/deposition episodes.

For many indigenous cultures, though not exclusively, threats extend to the intangible heritage values associated with a site (Carmichael et al. 2017, p. 166; Newland et al. 2017, pp. 118-119; Perikidas et al. 2017, p. 145; Brimblecombe & Hayshi 2017, pp. 181-182; Rockman & Maase 2017, p. 107). Problematically, the rate of loss of cultural heritage is not quantified in most countries. Monitoring efforts have occurred in Scotland (Dawson et al. 2017), since the mid-1990s, and more recently in other countries including: England, Wales, Ireland, Brittany, Alaska, Iceland, Greenland, Australia, Florida and Cyprus (Wragg et al. 2017; Gerrard 2017; Bonsall & Moore 2017; Benlloch et al. 2017; Jensen 2017; Palsdottir & Feeley 2017; Hollensen et al. 2017; Carmichael et al. 2017; Scott-Ireton 2014; Andreou et al. 2015).

In the face of cultural and environmental challenges, heritage managers must do what they can to work with local communities and collaborate nationally and internationally with colleagues to protect sites and their associated values. Typically, this role is usually constrained by limited financial and human resources and lower prioritisation than other governmental activities. The purpose of this paper is a ‘call to arms’ for underwater cultural heritage managers in and around the Pacific and globally. We are not alone; the global community has given us a framework to work within, the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (the Convention), that respects shared heritage values, and facilitates communication and skill sharing. Through this framework, or in parallel with this framework, we can communicate with each other and collaborate to understand the nature, scale and options to protect, manage and document our disappearing heritage.

Australia’s legislative regime and consideration of ratification of the UNESCO 2001 Convention

Australia’s Commonwealth legislative protection for shipwrecks resulted from the discovery of four old Dutch Shipwrecks off the coast of Western Australia (Kennedy 1998, p. 34; Henderson 1986, p. 72) and in 1976, the Australian Government introduced the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 (Cth) (Ryan 1977, pp. 23-27; O’Keefe & Prott 1978, pp. 119-138; Cassidy 1991, pp. 4-6).

While the Australian Government did not progress the mooted idea of a marine archaeology Convention in 1976, in 1996 another Australian, Graeme Henderson, then Director of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, formed a special interest group within the Australian branch of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) - The International Committee on the Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH) (ICUCH 2018). This group drafted the 1996 ICOMOS adopted International Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage. In 2001, this guide to the ethics and practices of underwater cultural heritage management throughout the world was incorporated as the Annex to the Convention (ICUCH 2018).

In Australia, recognition of the need for legislative amendment of the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 (Cth) (the Act) and its delivery has been a multi-decade process. Since the Act’s proclamation in 1976, Australia has ratified the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Recognising that there were significant domestic policy, compliance and international policy reasons for modernising the Act, it was publicly reviewed in 2009 (Viduka 2012, pp. 1-9). Information coming from the 2009 review resulted in the endorsement by the Commonwealth, States and the Northern Territory of the 2010 Australian Underwater Cultural Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). The IGA codifies the practices and processes for administering Australia’s UCH that have been in use for over 20 years and requires all relevant state and territory governments to amend their legislation to meet the requirements of the Convention, should the Australian Government decide to ratify (Henderson & Viduka 2014; Viduka 2014, pp. 12-14). Movement towards ratification gives a policy basis for the Australian Government to engage more closely with regional countries in the protection of underwater cultural heritage.
In November 2016, for the start of the sixth International Congress on Underwater Archaeology (IKUWA6) in Fremantle, Western Australia, the then Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, announced that Australia would introduce new legislation to protect all UCH and to come into line with the Convention (Viduka 2019).

**The Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018**

Australia’s new *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018* (UCH Act) received Royal Assent on 24 August 2018 (Parliament of Australia 2018). The UCH Act came into force on 1 July 2019 and has replaced the framework established by the now repealed Historic Shipwrecks Act. The UCH Act also includes a number of legislative changes to align with the Convention, some of which have an external impact without ratification.

Australia has managed the heritage of other States in our waters with consideration and inclusion, such as the Japanese midget submarine M24 that resulted in a 2009 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award of Distinction. Prior to the illegal salvaging of HMAS *Perth* (I), Australia has not systematically aspired to seek protection for our heritage in other State’s waters or to work with the heritage management agencies in other States to ensure a positive outcome for such heritage. For the first time ever, the UCH Act maintains Australia’s sovereignty of our Defence and other heritage lost in waters outside of Australian jurisdiction (s.52). The UCH Act recognises the need to work with the nearest Coastal State to affect any protection (s.18) and imposes the same standards on Australians, in regard to impacting UCH, wherever they are in the world (s.7), aligning closely with the Convention. The UCH Act effectively broadens Australia’s UCH focus from purely domestic outcomes.

**Ratified states in the Asia-Pacific region**

In the UNESCO defined Asia-Pacific Region, only three States have ratified the Convention to date and only one of those States is in the Pacific. Cambodia was the first regional State to progress ratification on 24 November 2007. It was the sixteenth ratification instrument to have been deposited, with the Convention only coming into force after the 20th instrument was deposited on 2 January 2009. Iran was the second regional State to ratify, depositing its instrument on 16 June 2009. Lastly, and certainly most significantly for the Pacific region, The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) ratified the Convention depositing their instrument on 19 April 2018. FSM were the 59th State Party to the Convention.

Since ratification Iran has made significant positive steps including establishing an underwater cultural heritage unit under Mr Hussein Toufighian and initiating a number of workshops with a focus on the Convention, collaboration and practical training. These include the 2016 workshop that highlighted the potential underwater cultural heritage resource in the Persian Gulf (UNESCO Iran 2016) and the 2019 workshop focussed on the Caspian Sea (UNESCO Iran 2019).

Cambodia’s maritime archaeological and collaborative engagement activities post ratification are less well known to the author, though they have significant internal waters including around Angkor Wat and a small coastline in the Gulf of Thailand.

FSM are making significant efforts to develop their programs and meet the legislative requirements of the Convention (Forrest and Jeffery 2018). Dr Bill Jeffery from the University of Guam has successfully incorporated the University as an associate member of the UNESCO University Twinning and Networking (UNITWIN) programme for maritime archaeology coordinated by Flinders University in Australia. Dr Jeffery has also led the development of a very active maritime programme within the Anthropology department of the University. Dr Jeffery has run a number of maritime archaeology workshops culminating in the recent (3-28 June 2019) UNESCO supported field school in Chuuk that explicitly aimed to facilitate the implementation of the UCH Convention in FSM as a party to the UCH Convention (2001). The objectives of this activity are to strengthen the capacity of FSM for safeguarding UCH and to develop Chuuk as a centre for UCH safeguarding in Micronesia (University of Guam 2019).
The status of some Pacific Island States in regard to ratification of the convention

Concerning other Pacific Islands States and their consideration or not of the Convention, Table 1 below summarises the author’s current understanding (UNESCO Apia, 2010; UNESCO Apia 2015; UNESCO Apia 2018; UNESCO Apia 2019). Importantly this snapshot shows that there is momentum in the Pacific towards ratification of the Convention. State party reports at conferences or workshops, from as recent as 2018, show that at least five Pacific States are actively considering the Convention: Fiji, Republic of Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Australia. Should these States all ratify the Convention, the Pacific will no longer be the least represented region of the Convention, and each State will have an official basis for significant, positive collaboration between regional State Parties.

A key factor in the momentum towards ratification in the Pacific has been the UNESCO Apia office’s active engagement. Through this UNESCO office, and the Paris based Secretariat, UNESCO has successfully communicated the values of the Convention to regional States and worked actively to engage Pacific Island States. These efforts started with the launch of the Pacific UCH Programme in 2009 at the first regional workshop on the Pacific underwater cultural heritage held in Solomon Islands (UNESCO Apia 2010). A key turning point in regional engagement occurred in 2014 when UCH was considered at the 3rd UN International Conference on Small Island Developing States (Samoa 2014). Since 2009, UNESCO has supported regional capacity building activities, workshops and the attendance of Pacific based researchers at international conferences such as the triennial Asia-Pacific Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage. UNESCO’s efforts have been augmented by the contributions from the Pacific Underwater Cultural Heritage Partnership Network members who in cooperation with UNESCO published a report focused on the Pacific and good practice in the protection and management of WWII-related UCH (UNESCO Apia, 2017).

Table 1: Desktop review of the status of consideration and legislative alignment with the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Intent in regards to ratification of the Convention</th>
<th>Legislative amendments requirement</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Considering</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Australian Heritage Strategy 2015-2020, p. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>UNESCO Apia 2018, p. 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated States of Micronesia (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae)</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Forrest, C &amp; Jeffery, B 2018, p. 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>UNESCO Apia 2018, p. 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>UNESCO Apia 2018, p. 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Forrest, C &amp; Jeffery, B 2018, p. 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Forrest, C &amp; Jeffery, B 2018, p. 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Recognise</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>Considering</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Forrest, C &amp; Jeffery, B 2018, p. 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Marshall Islands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Forrest, C &amp; Jeffery, B 2018, p. 79 Communications UNESCO Apia 15 June 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Communications UNESCO Apia 15 June 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>UNESCO Apia 2018, p. 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvula</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Australia’s heritage in the Pacific**

It is important to recognise that Australia has a significant amount of shared UCH in the Pacific. The Coral Sea was not only Australia’s first ‘national highway’ but the venue for a range of early resource recovery activities that sustained and built the early colony. Whaling, bêche-de-mer, sandalwood and guano were all early maritime resource industries (Bach 1976). Australia also has a less savoury underwater heritage aspect for people from the Southwest Pacific with a history of blackbirding and a labour trade (Beck 2009).

In its earliest conception, the colony of New South Wales was to settle Norfolk Island as an auxiliary settlement. This colonisation requirement combined with prevailing weather patterns and a reliance upon sailing, firmly set Australia’s face towards the Pacific.

Vessels registered in the fledgling colonies or in post Federation Australia, plied the waters of the Pacific, exploring, trading and interacting with communities. Perhaps the most famous of Australian shipping companies trading in the Southwest Pacific was the Burns, Philp and Company. While the legacy of Australian individual and company interactions in the Southwest Pacific has not always been positive, sites such as the 1893 shipwreck *Foam* on Queensland’s Myrmidon Reef, enable us to collaborate with regional countries to tell the story of Australia’s labour trade through everyone’s perspectives. Equally, vessels such as the 1925 Norfolk Island built *Resolution*, which subsequently sunk at anchor in Port Villa, Vanuatu, potentially enables members of the Norfolk Island Maritime Archaeological Associations to work collaboratively with counterparts in Vanuatu (Viduka 2017, pp. 155-177).

**Collaboration in maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage management**

In the current Australian Heritage Strategy, three objectives relate to UCH. Two of the objectives we have discussed; legislative amendment and Australia’s consideration of ratification of the Convention. However, the third objective which is of equal importance ‘is to work with Southeast Asian and Pacific region States to better protect our shared heritage’ (Australian Heritage Strategy 2015-2020).

The 1972 Agreement between the Netherlands and Australia concerning Old Dutch Shipwrecks (ANCODS Agreement) has been globally influential and formed the basis for the cooperative framework embedded within the Convention (O’Keefe 2014, pp. 7-9). However, over time, non-treaty binding arrangements have been preferred by the Australian Government as a flexible vehicle to further collaboration on shared heritage.
The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy has now entered into three similar Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with: the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic - Atmospheric Administration and National Ocean Service - Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (Viduka & Luckman 2013, pp. 98-106); the Indonesian National Center of Archaeology (ARKENAS); and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands. All of these agreements are for Collaboration in Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage Management (Australian Government website). A fourth and fifth MoU with Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands respectively, is currently being discussed. These MoUs when finalised will enable much closer collaboration and capacity building activities between all parties.

There remain a significant number of States in the Pacific that Australia might seek to form closer ties with, so that the standard of maritime archaeology, UCH management and archaeological site and object conservation can be raised to a level in line with the best practice principles of the Convention. Pacific Island States with clear historical links and shared underwater heritage sites are logically the first priority for engagement.

**Australian National Shipwrecks Database as a regional tool supporting collaboration**

The Australasian Underwater Cultural Heritage Database (AUCHD), previously the Australian National Shipwrecks Database (Lorimer 1988, pp. 33-36; Green & Vosmer 1993 pp. 3-4), is a relational database that was designed and developed to meet the requirements of the Act and its cooperative administration. AUCHD was designed to support future engagement with other States, including Pacific Island States (Luckman & Viduka 2013, pp.76-86).

The AUCHD offers a multiplicity of exciting possibilities for research into all areas of UCH, not just for shipwrecks (Luckman & Viduka 2013, pp. 76-86; Viduka 2015, pp. 12-18). For public use, the AUCHD contains both basic and advanced textual search functions and a GIS system to assist in locating information. Since 2013, Heritage New Zealand has used the AUCHD as a register for their UCH sites and to date; they have entered 2195 shipwrecks and two aircraft records into the database. In June 2018, Papua New Guinea formally joined the AUCHD and have identical functionality as New Zealand, enabling them to use the AUCHD online as a register for all UCH. To date no information has been added to the database.

In-line with the third objective in the Australian Heritage Strategy, the Australian Government is willing to collaborate with countries in the Pacific to protect UCH and is supportive of facilitating access to the AUCHD for interested Pacific Island States as a first step to closer regional cooperation.

**Threats to UCH in the Pacific—environmental threats**

While movement towards greater regional ratification of the Convention is certainly welcome, the pace of consideration by many States, including Australia, has left us regionally exposed without a multi-lateral framework underpinning close collaboration and support for the rule of law. In that policy void, cultural and natural threats to UCH in the Pacific are real, present and significant.

The largest threat—climate change, is yet to unfold in its entirety. Already, traditional owner groups in the north east Pacific are reporting an impact on their customs and traditions because fish have moved from their breeding grounds northward into the cooler waters of another tribe (Newland et al. 2017, pp.115-125). Changing weather has also negatively affected Japanese traditional holiday dates associated with cultural traditions of watching the cherry blossoms and autumnal colour (Brimblecombe & Hayashi 2017, pp.175-185).

Recognising that climate change with more extreme weather events are a threat to archaeology and its intangible values, there is an immediate need for all cultural heritage managers to systematically and longitudinally monitor the condition of archaeological sites and other heritage to enable prioritisation of protection. In Australia, as part of my PhD research, I have developed
a citizen science project called Gathering Information via Recreational and Technical (GIRT) Scientific Divers’, to help address these challenges and create an engaged and informed public.

Within the AUCHD all users have the potential to collect reports by members of their public of the impacts or increased threats to UCH. One advantage of this functionality is that the data is geographically displayed and easily shared with other regional States, who can see trend behaviour and then also prioritise local/regional responses.

Threats to UCH in the Pacific—human threats

While human threats, usually termed cultural activity, pale in the scale of potential natural threats for UCH, this threat is no less permanent and cataclysmic. Unlike nature, controlling the actions of people is something that can be managed by people. Accepting that there are a large range of human actions that can have a devastating impact on UCH, this paper will focus on one example, illegal salvage.

As has been well documented and publicised, at least 48 WWII period shipwrecks including British, Dutch and Japanese Sovereign vessels have been totally or considerably salvaged in Southeast Asian waters in recent years (Chua 2018). Australia was not immune from this loss of UCH with the Australian Sovereign vessel HMAS Perth (I) being one of those impacted sites.

The Australian Government recognises that the illegal salvaging of Perth was facilitated by two domestic policy issues:

- lack of ongoing proactive engagement with the nearest Coastal State indicating our interest in the protection of the heritage; and
- lack of support for a baseline survey and ongoing monitoring of the site to document change of condition.

Through the Australian Heritage Strategy and UCH Act, the Australian Government has made steps to remedy these policy gaps by signalling the need to engage proactively with Coastal States where our UCH is located.

We are all aware that by working collaboratively we can support each other and collectively raise our standards in maritime archaeology, foster interactions and facilitate peer-based communication. Working collaboratively also has the potential for a regional network of cultural heritage managers/maritime archaeologists supporting site protection and monitoring. This may also work to combat pillaging, commercial exploitation and illicit trafficking (local and trans-national) of UCH. Collaboration across States is in line with the Convention and outcomes of regional workshops such as the 2017 ASEAN-UNESCO Conference on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage in Makassar, Indonesia (ASEAN Conference 2017).

Pacific UCH is under threat from illegal salvagers. With the environment for salvage vessels operating in Southeast Asian waters is becoming more problematic, it is inevitable that they will move to new areas of opportunity. These large purpose-built vessels do not make money being idle and the owners and operators have demonstrated a contempt for law, sovereignty and human dignity in their pursuit of personal profits. The Pacific, with its significant WWII shipwreck and aircraft heritage, is a highly attractive market for scrap metal salvagers and collectors. To prevent the same UCH disaster that has happened in Southeast Asia occurring in the Pacific, in my personal view, it is now timely for all Pacific Island States and countries bordering the Pacific to collaborate to protect UCH. Beyond the cultural values being protected, such collaboration would support existing and new sustainable cultural tourism, retain wrecks which are fish aggregation spots and important sources of food security in some communities, and ensure the local marine environment is not contaminated by oil spills directly resulting from illegal salvaging activities. All of these outcomes can be directly referenced back to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In reality, the Convention offers the world’s best practice framework and a means for States to work together, bilaterally, multi-laterally or regionally. However, the Convention’s uptake in the
Asia-Pacific Region has been slow and this leaves us all exposed to the unscrupulous actions of a few. Stepping into this policy void, a regional informal peer-based network protecting UCH would work to develop a cohort of skilled regulatory officers and ensure the rule of law is enforced.

**UCH capacity building in the Pacific**

Based on interest from countries and individuals in the Pacific, it is timely to explore capacity building training in maritime archaeology supported by Australia. In 2012 ICOMOS -ICUCH in conjunction with UNESCO Bangkok produced an open-source ‘Training Manual for the UNESCO Foundation Course on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific’ (UNESCO - Bangkok 2012). The ICUCH six-week Foundation Course was designed for up to 20 participants and includes training on diving as well as archaeological method, remote sensing and conservation. This comprehensive training manual is readily adaptable to address specific training needs and can be modified to include published research such as the already referenced ‘Report on Good Practice in the Protection and Management of WWII-related Underwater Cultural Heritage in the Pacific Small Island States and Territories’ (UNESCO-Apia 2017).

Alternatively, the four-part Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) curriculum could be utilised. This curriculum has been modified by the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) to offer more detailed local case studies in maritime archaeology (AIMA/NAS 2018).

**Concluding remarks**

The Pacific region is slowly moving towards broader ratification of the Convention. Led by FSM, at least five other States in the region are actively considering ratification. However, until more States have ratified, this best practice framework for collaboration and information sharing is not being effectively utilised.

The Pacific, like Southeast Asia, ‘has a rich maritime heritage that is currently under active threat of looting, destruction and illegal salvage’ (ASEAN Conference 2017). Like Southeast Asia, Pacific Island States and countries bordering the Pacific would benefit from a programme to build an informed public, share knowledge and develop expertise that supports the protection of the UCH. However, as emphasised in this paper, the threats to UCH and all other heritage in the Pacific goes beyond cultural activity. The need to collaborate and share information, skills and resources is vital to understand, monitor and potentially address or mitigate the impacts of climate change on the physical and intangible values of heritage sites.

As a first step to developing a regional network of site monitoring, compliance and UCH management officers, the Australian Government has committed to work with Pacific Island States to protect our shared heritage more effectively. Specifically, all Island States in the Southwest Pacific with Australian shared underwater cultural heritage are eligible to use the AUCHD as a regional UCH register resource. In step with access to the AUCHD, those Pacific Island States would be encouraged to enter into a bilateral MoU that would facilitate broader engagement by third parties prior to either State ratifying the Convention. A MoU would support universities, appropriate avocational research groups and individuals for the purpose of collaboration and protection of UCH. I believe these basic steps will, over time, facilitate the development of a regional network supporting better compliance, UCH management and potentially even ratification by States.

**Acknowledgements**

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