'Its all up for grabs folks, lets get stuck into it'. This was the gist of the words of Stan Waterman, (champion of the ‘Save the Whales’ campaign,) introducing his fellow speaker Mel Fischer, treasure hunter extraordinaire of *Atocha* fame, to some 500 divers at Monash University a decade ago. They were attending a gathering called ‘Oceans’. Australian organisers had flown Fischer and his baubles in from the United States as the star attraction. It seemed to me ironical that Waterman, who showed so much concern for the oceans’ natural heritage, should be so contemptuous of the cultural heritage.

Glyn Daniel in his book, *A Short History of Archaeology*, summarises the changed approach to archaeology since the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> Archaeology began in looting: the search for works of art for private or national collections. Belzoni, Rassam, Mariette and Layard were all concerned with finding treasures. Gradually this has changed to careful excavation and now to deliberately planned excavation to solve particular problems. Problem-oriented archaeology has eventually succeeded tomb robbing. (Daniel, 1981:216)

But in most of the world’s oceans, archaeology is still effectively back in the tomb with Belzoni in 1837 when, as he stated,

> Every step I took I crushed a mummy in some part or other. (cited in ibid)

Today, because of advances in underwater technology, access to the underwater cultural heritage has increased at a faster rate than the implementation of appropriate public policy, and the result is an unprecedented level of destruction.

James Delgado has posed a family-tree chart of shipwreck approaches which can be applied here. These approaches are salvage, treasure hunting, archaeology, mitigation, cultural resource management, and recreation and tourism. (Delgado, 1988:11) I will expand upon these approaches.

1. **SALVAGE** The goal of salvage is the quick recovery of damaged or soon-to-be-damaged cargo or hull from *newly wrecked* ships. It is not concerned with preserving the shipwreck, but is purely a monetary concern.

2. **TREASURE HUNTING** Treasure hunting is the recovery of valuable commodities from the past. It initially focussed on gold and silver but is now concentrated increasingly on other goods for a maritime antiquities market. It contradicts every tenet of historic preservation. Marketing is an essential component.

3. **ARCHAEOLOGY** Archaeologists include nautical archaeologists, who study ship construction, outfitting and voyaging of vessels, and maritime archaeologists, who study the maritime aspects of a culture and examine how maritime life reflects the broader culture ashore.
4. MITIGATION Mitigation is reactive - the recovery of meaningful information from sites already damaged, or threatened by construction activity, etc.

5. CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Cultural resource management involves identification, evaluation, protection, and interpretation or enhancement.

6. RECREATION AND TOURISM The greatest recreation and tourist interest probably lies in the opportunity to visit wrecks on the bottom, but there are also recovered hulls put on display for the public.

I will now briefly examine the above approaches by particular countries to old shipwrecks, where salvage is not applicable.

1. UNITED KINGDOM

The Department of Transport was, until recently, responsible for administering the Protection of Wrecks Act and the procedures for dealing with material recovered from the sea under the Merchant Shipping Act. The legislation requires that the artefacts be sold after the archaeologist has done the excavation! The Department of Transport had no heritage expertise so the Government appointed an advisory committee on historic wreck sites. Included on that committee was Rex Cowan, a lawyer-cum-diver with a reputation as the most successful treasure hunter in the United Kingdom. Treasure hunting is entrenched in Britain - many of the best known underwater archaeologists approving of the retrieval of artefacts for sale. I received an advertisement from a group called 'Invincible Conservations', inviting me to buy cannonballs excavated from a British warship wrecked in 1758. The blurb described the site as of major historical and archaeological importance. Associated with the project is the Chatham Historic Dockyard.

In the United Kingdom there has for several decades been strong interest in nautical archaeology with good results, the focus being the International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration. Keith Muckelroy of Britain systematically developed the concept of maritime archaeology, but it has not been persevered with at similar pace since his death.

There is a small archaeological diving unit (5 including lecturing staff), based at the University of St Andrews, which has been contracted by the Department of Transport to provide site assessments, reports on the standard of work on designated sites etc. But in 1989 the unit manager wrote: 'What is required is an effective management program utilising available resources and a pro-active policy of survey and preservation in situ.' (Rednap and Dean, 1989)

The recovered hull of the Mary Rose is very successful in terms of recreation and tourism.

2. UNITED STATES

The best remnants of Spanish maritime heritage off the United States have been lost to treasure hunters. There is a very powerful lobby group whose publicity program extends world-wide. The recent Abandoned Shipwrecks Act and the accompanying Guidelines are great steps forward, but provision in the Guidelines for the 'establishment of a permit program for the commercial salvage of abandoned shipwrecks' is worrying.

A number of States have maritime archaeology programs. Research has largely been dictated by the association of particular vessels with important events in American history.
The Federal Government's National Parks Service has played a leading role in the area of cultural resource management. The *Abandoned Shipwrecks Act* is intended to encourage various States to develop programs. About half the States have now established management programs.

3. NETHERLANDS

The Ministry of Finance was until recently giving exclusive contracts for excavation of significant shipwreck sites to inappropriate individuals. Rex Cowan has been contracted on a basis of giving 10% of the auction sale proceeds to the Government. (Green, 1988). There is now a central State service for archaeological research employing a small unit in maritime archaeology, and work of a high standard is being done.

The reclaimed lands projects are well known examples of mitigation. Replicas, with implications for research, education, recreation and tourism, are currently being built of two Dutch East Indiamen, the seventeenth century *Batavia* and the eighteenth century *Amsterdam*.

4. ASIA

In the Philippines, museums give licences to commercial operators. American licensee Robert Marx, in his prospectus to investors, estimated the take from one ship - his partnership gets 70% and Manila gets 30% - at $500 million. (Asiaweek 18 March, 1988). In Singapore the National Museum, needing an expert to locate and salvage historic wrecks, called on Mike Hatcher, who had previously sold, through Christies’ auction house, the porcelain cargo of the historic Dutch ship *Geldermalsen*, for about 10 million pounds.

Archaeological work is being done on indigenous and regional craft on land in many Asian countries. There is little to be seen of cultural resource management, recreation or tourism projects relating to the underwater cultural heritage.

I will now look at some of the international approaches, that is, where several nations, or people from several nations, are involved.

TREASURE HUNTING. The treasure hunters have well developed multinational communications networks. They are international rovers, often with previous experience in the oil exploration industry.

ARCHAEOLOGY. There are numerous examples of archaeologists from one country taking a team to another country to conduct archaeological surveys and excavations. The best known example is the American, George Bass, in the Mediterranean. There has been a United Kingdom team working on a site in Kenya, and Jeremy Green has done work in a number of Asian countries. The American group Earthwatch has made substantial contributions. But there has been little in the way of truly multinational efforts.

MITIGATION. The first example of international cooperation in an archaeological venture was the highly successful UNESCO project to salvage Nubia when the Aswan Dam was built in Egypt in 1959. Nothing comparable has occurred in the underwater cultural heritage.

CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. There are in existence general heritage standards such as the ICOM Code of Ethics and the UNESCO Convention on the Moveable Cultural Heritage, but until recently there has been little in the way of international standards dealing specifically with the underwater cultural heritage.
Two developments are under way. The Council of Europe unsuccessfully tried to develop a convention on the underwater heritage, and that project has been resurrected by Sydney law lecturer Patrick O’Keefe. The maritime museums organisation ‘International Congress of Maritime Museums’ is expected next year to ratify a series of resolutions which will provide a standard for museums acquiring artefacts from underwater sites.

RECREATION AND TOURISM There have been no major multinational efforts in this area

What then are the major strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to the underwater cultural heritage? Among the strengths are:

1. Applications of modern technology.
2. Strong awareness among practitioners of the need for community involvement in projects and for community access to sites and program results.
3. Strong popular appeal among the general community (for example the Wasa Museum in Stockholm).

Among the weaknesses are:

1. The isolation of maritime archaeologists from the other branches of archaeology, and a lack of awareness about bodies like ICOMOS.
2. Inadequate representation at tertiary education level.
3. Lack of adequate legislation, and of machinery for implementing the provisions of legislation.
4. The isolation of maritime archaeologists of one country from those of other countries.
5. Ad hoc approaches to individual sites, and lack of overall management strategies for regions.
6. Infiltration of treasure hunting mentality among professional maritime archaeologists. This has been exacerbated by the attitude of many Western governments that every aspect of life must incorporate the profit motive.
7. Lack of generally agreed collecting policies among museums.

In conclusion then, I see the lack of multinational communication and agreement among archaeologists and heritage managers as perhaps the major problem in the current approaches to the underwater cultural heritage.

References


