INTRODUCTION

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It is pleasing that Australia ICOMOS recognises the significant achievements which Australian maritime archaeologists have made internationally and nationally by incorporating this workshop as part of this ICOMOS conference. Equally importantly, it recognises the achievement by Australian specialists in obtaining the agreement of ICOMOS Paris to establish the ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage.

By way of background to this workshop, it is useful to identify what the Australian Government in concert with the States has achieved in the past decade or so, and future objectives in relation to the protection and preservation of Australia’s underwater cultural heritage.

The Commonwealth’s *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* applies to Australian waters adjacent to all States and the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth provided direct grants to the States/Northern Territory, totalling $391,000 in 1991-92, to investigate and document wreck sites, conserve artefacts, develop management programmes, including protective regimes, and to develop public programmes. Most states now administer either parallel legislation which apply to internal waters, or heritage legislation which includes protection of wreck sites and objects.

To date, wrecks have been declared “historic” on a case-by-case basis, and approximately 150 wrecks are declared at the moment. The day-to-day administration of the Act is carried out in each State and the Northern Territory by a delegate, appointed by the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts and Territories. The delegates are drawn from museums (in the case of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory), archaeology (Victoria) and heritage and planning agencies (New South Wales and Tasmania). On occasion, this diversity of subject specialisation can pose some interesting debate on policy formulation and the direction of the Historic Shipwrecks Program, but it is very important to get the balanced view.

During the 1970s and 1980s the Program’s emphasis was quite properly on site investigation, research and documentation of sites and associated artefacts, and some public education programs. While the Commonwealth was happy with this, it may be true to say, with the benefit of hindsight, that the Commonwealth did not provide sufficient direction or focus to the Program to ensure a consistent national approach to the management of this resource.

Following a review of the effectiveness of the legislation in 1989/90, the Commonwealth and delegates developed program objectives and strategies. This has been a major achievement, which will provide a uniform focus to the program during this decade as well as assisting with determining management and resource priorities. There are four primary objectives:

(1) to conserve and protect historic shipwreck sites and associated material as a cultural resource of the nation;

(2) to develop a comprehensive register of historic shipwrecks and associated material;

(3) to obtain the support of an informed public for historic shipwrecks as a cultural resource; and
(4) to promote the commitment by Government authorities (at all levels) to the protection and preservation of historic shipwrecks and associated material.

The strategies to achieve these objectives are still being refined. In addition, the Commonwealth and the Delegates still need to consider what the Program is to achieve during the next three to five years. An example of the statement of objectives and strategies (in this case, Western Australia) is attached.

At the risk of making a statement which might be seen by the practitioners as too general or sweeping, it would be fair to say that the emphasis in most State shipwreck programs has shifted from one almost devoted entirely to site inspection, research and documentation, to a mix of those functions mentioned above, as well as developing and implementing site management plans and increasing public appreciation and support for shipwrecks as a cultural resource, physically and intellectually. Moreover, there has been a shift away from ad hoc excavation of wreck sites to excavation designed to answer specific questions and preservation of other wrecks in situ.

These developments reflect international trends, especially in northern Europe and Canada. As an aside, it is useful to recall that until 10 or more years ago there was only one professional maritime archaeology unit in Australia - at the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle - and the discipline as practised in Australia, while highly professional, is still in the early stages of growth. The major challenges to the maritime archaeology discipline, its practitioners and resource managers during this decade, will be getting the mix of these functions correct as far as possible, compiling and refining site management plans for those sites at most risk, and public outreach programs. Moreover, the Program has to be managed in the context of economic constraints and competing priorities, as well as increasing recreational use of underwater cultural heritage sites and consequent impact on the values of these sites.

The Commonwealth and the States/Northern Territory are tackling these central issues in three primary ways.

For a number of years the States have requested that the Commonwealth implement that section of the Act which provides for the blanket protection of all wrecks over 75 years old in Australian waters. There was reluctance on the Commonwealth's part to accept this request as it raised some fundamental questions, about the meaning of "historic" and should there be a new piece of legislation which protects all abandoned wrecks over a certain age and recognises formally a wider range of criteria of significance rather than just historic, such as scientific, recreational and aesthetic. There were, and still are, a number of management and resource issues to be resolved since the prospect of moving from the protection of 150 to 5,000 wreck sites overnight is somewhat daunting.

We are at the stage now where the States have recommended to the Commonwealth Minister that she agree to the implementation of the blanket declaration provisions of the Act at some stage (still to be determined) during 1992. This is subject to the resolution by the delegates of the management regimes that will come into effect under this new arrangement.

An underlying premise of the Historic Shipwrecks Act and our Program over the past 15 years has been to record and document the 5000 or so shipwreck sites and associated relics. Recently, the Commonwealth sponsored a national project by the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) to develop a national shipwrecks data base. This data base will be a comprehensive guide to the nation’s underwater cultural heritage resources. It will be maintained and updated by the
professional maritime archaeologists in each State and the Northern Territory, and all Australians will have access to it. This approach to documenting one component of the nation's cultural heritage is similar to other projects being undertaken in museums and other heritage agencies so that intellectual access to the nation's heritage can be maximised.

The final issue relates to management of shipwrecks as both a cultural heritage and a contemporary cultural resource. I have mentioned already the increasing recreational use of sites. At the request of the Delegates, AIMA has prepared a statement of principles and a detailed statement of guidelines for access, use, management and preservation of sites and associated relics. These statements will be endorsed shortly by the Minister and the Commonwealth intends to distribute them widely.

In another exercise, the Commonwealth is working with the Delegates to formulate clear guidelines governing public access to sites, especially in circumstances which might result in some disturbance to the sites. We have in mind those occasions when maritime historical societies, amateur maritime archaeological groups and recreational diving societies, for example, wish to investigate and document sites. I would emphasise that, under the proposed guidelines, these groups should be able to demonstrate suitable competence, and they will be supervised by professional maritime archaeologists. All recovered artefacts will be registered and accessioned into the collection of an appropriate State museum or agency with statutory responsibility for collections.

Complementing all of these activities are the public education programs undertaken by the State and Territory agencies. Their focus has been on the diving community who are increasingly working in partnership - or at least in some form of harmony - with the professional archaeologists in protecting and preserving the wreck sites. I would also commend the various and diverse outreach programs such as exhibitions, ship-wreck trails and school and public education activities, devised by the States, which are intended to increase public awareness and appreciation of this significant cultural resource.

Many of the issues to which I have alluded will be amplified during the course of today's workshop.
**APPENDIX**

**Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976**

**PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES - WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Activities/Strategies</th>
<th>Verifiable Outcomes</th>
<th>Frequency of Reporting</th>
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| To conserve and protect historic shipwreck sites and associated material as a cultural resource of the nation | - locate, identify & evaluate wreck sites  
- develop management plans for particular wreck sites, including recovered relics  
- adherence to AIMA Code of Practice  
- research into historic shipwrecks/maritime archaeology in Australia  
- appoint and train inspectors | - number of sites located, identified & evaluated  
- number of management plans printed & made available  
- statement of how management plans and activities conform to Code  
- inform other delegates & DASET of work in progress  
- publish results of research undertaken  
- number of inspectors appointed & training programs undertaken | annual  
as published & annually  
annual  
ongoing & annually  
as published & annually  
annual |
| To develop a comprehensive register of historic shipwrecks and associated material | - develop and maintain data base for register | - number of sites and artefacts entered into register | annual |
| To obtain the support of an informed public for historic shipwrecks as a cultural resource | - develop and conduct schools and public education programs  
- issue appropriate publicity material  
- promote objectives through speeches and media releases  
- hold exhibitions in communities located close to wreck sites  
- promotion of shipwreck trails  
- liaison with and involvement of the diving community and other users of resource  
- training of volunteers and community groups in site & artefact management | - number of programs & activities undertaken and assessment of effectiveness  
- list of material published  
- number of speeches made/releases issued  
- number of exhibitions held  
- details of promotional activity/new trails established  
- number of meetings attended, contacts made and volunteers attached to diving projects  
- report of training programs or activities undertaken | annual  
as published & annually  
annual  
annual  
annual  
annual  
annual |
| To promote the commitment of Government authorities to the protection and preservation of historic shipwrecks and associated material | - involvement of Ministers and/or senior officers in shipwreck activities  
- funding support | - report of functions attended & details of other involvement  
- amount of funding received | annual  
annual |