THE ICOMOS INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE ON UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

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The ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage has been formed at an interesting stage in ICOMOS’s development. ICOMOS’s Executive Committee is developing an ICOMOS plan for the future, to clarify ICOMOS’s future role and program to deal effectively with the next quarter century.

The main area for program action by ICOMOS’s International Committees is laid down in the ICOMOS Statutes. It is to assemble and disseminate information concerning principles, techniques and policies dealing with conservation.

The objectives of the fledgling Underwater Cultural Heritage Committee have been laid down in the Committee’s Rules of Procedure. We are a small group - a Committee of 6 and a Secretariat of 7 - and we are just starting out, having received formal notification of the Committee’s creation only in December 1991 - 3 months ago. But we have quite ambitious plans which, if successful, will transform the international perspective on the underwater cultural heritage. Some of our ideas are, at best, tentative, and I present them here today because I know that you can give us advice on directions and new ideas from your varied experiences in heritage management.

The particular thrust of the Committee is to promote international cooperation in the identification, protection and conservation of underwater sites, and to advise ICOMOS on the development and implementation of programmes in this field. The objectives listed in our Rules of Procedure include:

1. Stimulation of interest in conservation among government institutions and the general public.

2. Promotion of systematic inventorying.

3. Development and promotion of effective strategies for conservation, management and presentation of the world’s underwater heritage.

4. Promotion of improved methods and standards for location, exploration, recording and intervention.

5. Establishment of standards for training and qualification of practitioners.

6. The sharing of experience and expertise in conservation and management.

To progress these objectives we have set ourselves a number of practical goals to be achieved in the short and medium terms. These are:

1. COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT. We will develop the Committee as an ongoing association with up to 30 voting members (leading international experts in the field of underwater cultural
heritage), and other categories of membership, including corresponding members - individuals whose support we will seek on particular issues.

2. MEETING ORGANISATION. We will organise meetings to further international cooperation and the other objectives listed in our Rules of Procedure.

3. IDENTIFICATION. We will identify the problem areas in the development of international cooperation. This must be our first major task - identify the problems and then devise strategies for resolution.

4. WORLD HERITAGE LISTING. We will investigate the feasibility of making available to managers of the underwater cultural heritage the mechanisms for world heritage listing of underwater sites. The first question that needs to be resolved is whether the existing conventions include provision for the underwater cultural heritage on world heritage listings. If so, then on the face of it, there are a number of particularly significant underwater sites which would in the listing process face relatively little opposition from vested interests, and would produce substantial benefits.

5. CONVENTION ON THE UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE. The idea of a special Convention on the Underwater Cultural Heritage was pursued through the Council of Europe several years ago. The idea was to develop a facility for responsible management of sites in offshore waters and international waters. My understanding is that it fell through at a time of difficulty between Greece and Turkey. The project has been resurrected by Patrick O'Keefe, Associate Professor of Law, through his International Committee on Cultural Heritage Law of the International Law Association. Dr O'Keefe has asked the ICOMOS Committee on Underwater Heritage to provide, as a part of the draft convention, a set of standards by which deviant conduct can be measured. It is needed by August 1994.

6. NATIONAL POLICIES REVIEW. We will review national policies and programs in underwater cultural heritage.

7. TEXTBOOK. A major campaign effort of ICOMOS over the past several years has been to have produced by each of the International Committees an appropriate textbook for young professionals in the relevant field. The schedule involved is to have manuscripts 'photo-ready' by December 1992, with the aim of publication in time for the General Assembly Meeting of ICOMOS in Sri Lanka in July/August 1993. Of course our problem is that our Committee has only just been formed. Nevertheless, the opportunity to be part of the series is attractive.

8. INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS. We will promote appropriate international projects on the underwater cultural heritage.

9. COMPATIBLE SYSTEMS. We will develop systems to enable international access to compatible databases, for example as relate to site registers.

10. PERMANENT PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION. [This is really a long term objective] We will eventually replace this committee with a permanent international professional association representing the underwater cultural heritage.
Our action plans and progress to date are as follows:

1. COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT.
   a) We have written to the 60 national committees of ICOMOS advising them of the existence of this Committee. We have received replies from thirteen countries to date. Some of the countries, for example the Republic of Slovenia, the USSR, Cyprus, and Honduras, have indicated inability to immediately nominate because of problems of war, restructuring, military occupation or a sense of having inadequate policies to deal with the underwater cultural heritage. These issues are ones that the Committee must come to a considered view about in terms of its priorities.
   b) We have received suggestions from existing Committee members for further recruitment.
   c) We have recruited six full members and are in the process of further recruitment.

2. MEETING ORGANISATION.
   a) We have organised today's half-day workshop under the umbrella of the ICOMOS Australia Conference.
   b) We have written to the Committee members seeking ideas for themes and speakers for workshops to be held in Sydney coinciding with the ICOMOS International Executive Committee meetings in November 1992.
   c) We have persuaded the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) to hold an International Conference in Sydney at a time which coincides with the ICOMOS meetings in November 1992. This liaison will bring a number of international experts to Sydney.
   d) We have approached funding agencies and obtained funds which can be used to assist targeted speakers to come to Australia.
   e) We are arranging venues for the November 1992 meetings.
   f) We will organise an international conference for 1994.

3. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION
   a) We have written to the Committee members seeking consideration of the matter.
   b) We will hold a brainstorming session at the November 1992 meeting to elicit ideas on the major problems to be overcome in achieving international cooperation.

4. WORLD HERITAGE LISTING
   a) We will write to the Committee members seeking expressions of interest for a project team and leader.
   b) We will establish a project team at the November 1992 meeting.

5. CONVENTION ON THE UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE
   a) We have written to the Committee seeking input to a review of the ICOMOS Charter and the UN 1956 Recommendations on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations, with a view to providing Patrick O'Keefe’s Committee with criteria for excavation/standards of conduct.
   b) We will discuss progress at the November 1992 meeting.
   c) We will form a project team at the November 1992 meeting.
   d) We will provide Patrick O'Keefe with a draft by November 1993.

6. NATIONAL POLICIES REVIEW
   a) We will write to Committee members seeking preparation of reports for the November 1992
   b) We will arrange for Committee member presentations at the November 1992 meeting.
c) At the November 1992 meeting we will arrange for a project team to prepare a questionnaire for review of national policies.

7. TEXTBOOK
   a) We have written to Committee members seeking views about the proposal.
   b) Ideas are coming in for a tentative chapter plan. But the series schedule is very tight, so we will make a decision soon as to whether we will take part in the project.

8. INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS
   a) We have written to Committee members seeking ideas.
   b) We will review ideas at the November 1992 meeting.

9. COMPATIBLE SYSTEMS
   a) We will write to Committee members seeking a project team and leader.
   b) We will establish a project team at the November 1992 meeting.

Doubtless time will prove some aspects of this preliminary schedule to have been over-ambitious. The full Committee’s first meeting in Sydney in November 1992 will provide further indication of the future directions of the Committee.