

## **Joint meeting agrees new emphasis on protecting and managing UK's underwater naval remains**

- **Admiralty House meeting hosted by The National Museum of the Royal Navy and Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) seeks to investigate and improve cross government management of UK underwater naval remains**
- **Focus is on their protection from unauthorised intrusion and illegal salvage**
- **Increased awareness and emphasis was needed on the potentially hazardous nature of the very fragile 19th and 20th century wrecks and the subsequent environment damage caused by unqualified intrusion**
- **Cross-government collaboration was agreed with development of multinational cooperation in monitoring and policing, and the use of emerging technologies.**

The National Museum of the Royal Navy and the Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust hosted a meeting at Admiralty House, Whitehall on 15th November 2017 to investigate improvements in the management of underwater naval remains, and to reemphasise their protection from unauthorised intrusion and illegal salvage.

Attendance included representatives of UK government departments and UK law enforcement officers, supported by environment and cultural advisers. The National Museum of the Royal Navy is the principal adviser to the Royal Navy on naval heritage and The Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) is a charitable company with the purpose of educating the public in maritime heritage with particular emphasis on maritime archaeology.

The meeting was convened to consider new technologies and practice employed elsewhere in the marine environment, such as the regulation of fishing, which would improve the current approach to the UK management of naval remains. It considered ways of mitigating the complexities of the legal frameworks and breadth of interested parties that has, in the past, created ambiguities. New ways of improved cooperation and collaboration were identified that should permit the early introduction of a new approach to management that meets the public's expectation.

Participants agreed that in addition to protecting the UK's undersea maritime heritage, emphasis needed to be placed on the potentially hazardous nature of the very fragile 19th and 20th century wrecks. In many cases, they contain unstable explosive material, highly toxic minerals and fuel oils that are hazardous to divers and potentially damaging to the environment if tampered with by those lacking the necessary expertise and motivation.

Future cross-government work will be more collaborative and emphasise the criminal acts particularly of dangerous and unauthorised salvage, taking advantage of new technologies and capabilities for monitoring, deterrence, prevention and enforcement with wider inclusion in existing government security and policing frameworks.

Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General of The National Museum of the Royal Navy, said “We have identified in this seminar a new cooperative approach that will enable more effective management of the UK’s naval remains. Surveillance and technologies employed in other government work will be helpful in monitoring the wrecks, to both record and protect the naval remains better”.

MAST Trustee, Vice Admiral Sir Anthony Dymock concluded the seminar in stating: “We are looking forward to discussion with international colleagues on how we could increase collaboration, so that together we might manage better the potential hazards and pursue the criminal, but also seek the commemoration of heroic naval actions in a manner that befits today’s expectations”.

The group will reconvene in April 2018 to review progress with aspirations for the embedding of a new initiative that will better protect naval remains in a manner that respects the environment and commemorates naval heroism.

Ends

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### **Notes for Editors**

What are naval remains? Naval remains are the wrecks of naval warships and aircraft, which include artefact and human remains. This can also include other vessels operating on behalf of the UK government at the time of their loss. Many of the ships are recognised as commemoration and the last resting place of their crew, so that the lives lost may be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve and would have received if their bodies had been buried on land.

There are examples provision is made for diver activity subject to appropriate licensing and agreements. These are unaffected by the new work, and will not preclude consideration of further sites provided the frameworks are followed.

MAST’s Royal Navy Loss List, available on MAST and NMRN’s websites, records that 4,793 RN ships were lost between 1512 and 1982. Not all locations are known.

Are naval remains managed differently to other maritime heritage? The management approach can vary, but the principles are similar especially with the issues of hazards and environmental impact. The work will be more closely aligned.

Why will there be more focus on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century naval remains? The warships of this period were largely built of iron and then steel, with deterioration often occurring faster and more unevenly than wooden remains. Warships of this period also contain large quantities of ordnance that is becoming unstable over time, and fuel oil that is highly polluting to the environment. The unstable wreck structure risks that these hazards can be released should there be unqualified intrusion from divers and salvage operations. This is often made worse when the activity is illegal, where the motive is financial gain rather than heritage and environment related.

How will government cooperation be improved? The legal framework protecting maritime heritage is complex. The seminar recognised that by giving renewed emphasis to the criminal act of theft and the environmental damage being caused through unauthorised and unqualified intrusion, the management of naval remains can be included within the government's wider work. This includes the use of remote surveillance and other technologies.