

THREATS TO OUR OCEAN HERITAGE

Deep Dive: Bottom Trawling

What is Ocean Heritage?

The stories of our societies and our ancestors are wrapped in intangible connection with the ocean and preserved on the seafloor as artefacts, shipwrecks, and remains of those lost or buried at sea. Marine global heritage has largely been based on natural features, and the inextricable link between natural and cultural has been ignored. Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) supports ecological marine biodiversity and helps boost sea connectivity in a shared space of natural and cultural heritage: Ocean Heritage.

Three Threats, Three Books

The Ocean Foundation has a new project that aims to bring awareness to the threats of bottom trawling, potentially polluting wrecks (PPW), and deep seabed mining (DSM) to underwater cultural heritage (UCH). In partnership with the Lloyd's Register Foundation Heritage and Education Centre and with cooperation from The International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH) within the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), it is one of the only endorsed Activities under the UN Decade for Ocean Science focusing on cultural heritage. The project will publish one open access book on each topic by 2025.

The Lloyd's Register Foundation Ocean Safety Foresight Review stresses the need for vastly increased effort around purposeful marine data collection and supports the UN Global Compact sustainable ocean principles calling for interventions to stimulate sharing of relevant scientific data. This project is an opportunity to unite cultural and scientific data to effect real change.

Check out the latest on the Bottom Trawling book here!



What is Bottom Trawling?

Every day, thousands of kilometers of the seabed are ploughed by trawlers, destroying both cultural and natural heritage. Maritime archaeologists and marine ecologists need to communicate and work together with fishers and policymakers to find ways to limit harm. Shipwrecks are as much part of the marine landscape - and thus of importance to ecologists - as they are to the cultural, historical landscape. Over time, shipwrecks come into equilibrium with the marine environment and become part of the benthic topography.

Shipwrecks can act as artificial reefs and safe habitats for juvenile species as well as their role as part of our shared past and history. Waters around protected wrecks have been documented to produce higher fish population and biomass than in areas of high trawling with no structures on the seafloor, increasing the strength of surrounding fish stocks. Trawling destroys this equilibrium and impacts all elements of Ocean Heritage.

There is a time-limited conjunction of threat and opportunity. Never has UCH been under greater threat from industrial activity and the adverse effects of accelerating climate change. Equally, the launch of the UN Decade of Ocean Science and the agreement on the High Seas treaty means that there has never been a better opportunity to define and promote the standard and protocols required to deal with the urgent threats and safety challenges.



Key Topics

Legal Duty to Protect Ocean Heritage

Maritime Historical Ecology

Spillover Effect

Artificial Reefs

Shipwreck Destruction Risks

Biodiversity Risks

... and more!