

Satellites protect wreck sites from looting

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Dutch Inspectorate and Cultural Heritage Agency award contract to the Maritime Observatory to continue monitoring important underwater heritage sites

The Information and Heritage Inspectorate and Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), both part of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, have contracted the Maritime Observatory to monitor important underwater maritime heritage sites in the Waddenzee or Dutch territorial North Sea.

The Maritime Observatory (MO), a British organisation, uses satellite technology, artificial intelligence and local intelligence sources to monitor twelve shipwreck sites, ranging from the 15th to the 20th century in Dutch territorial waters. The project follows on from a previous wreck monitoring programme undertaken within the International Programme for Maritime Heritage of the RCE and executed by the MO in 2019, focusing on seven Dutch shipwrecks located in domestic waters and overseas in Belgium, UK, and Malaysia. By collaborating with the MO, the Dutch government is intent on preventing the looting of important sites for their artefacts and metals and for the monitoring of any wreck that could potentially suffer an environmental issue with fuel oil or ordnance due to human activity.

Monitoring underwater heritage sites at risk

The Maritime Observatory (MO) has harnessed the growing capabilities of the commercial satellite sector to create a hub for monitoring the maritime and marine domain. Its purpose is to actively monitor and share information among relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, to protect wreck sites and deter illegal activity at sea. By combining archaeological expertise and specialist knowledge with advanced technologies, the MO enables effective monitoring, enforcement and compliance for the protection of maritime heritage sites and disseminates relevant information to the appropriate authorities.

The aim of the project is to keep an eye on the wrecks and better understand which sites are at risk and how they are threatened. This is vital to enable the Inspectorate, the RCE and other agencies and authorities to take timely measures and collaborate on the protection of these vulnerable heritage sites.

The Maritime Observatory is a partnership between the Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) and OceanMind. MAST the global experts in underwater maritime heritage joined forces with OceanMind, a not-for-profit organisation which harnesses the growing capabilities of the space sector to provide monitoring of human activity on the oceans.

Jessica Berry, MAST CEO, said: "Maritime heritage and the marine environment must not be studied in isolation from wider issues of maritime security. This exciting project will continue to help the Dutch Inspectorate be better able to understand human activity at these sites and take the right enforcement actions where necessary"

Martijn Manders, maritime archaeologist at RCE said "we are pleased to have been able to set up the collaboration with the Inspectorate in the protection of the underwater cultural heritage, evolving from the work done between 2019 and 2021 with the Maritime Observatory. It is important to continue to provide actionable intelligence on human activity at these culturally important undersea sites, in order for us to protect this heritage."

Note to the editors

About Maritime Observatory

The MO represents a turning point in the protection of underwater heritage sites, through a partnership between two charitable and not-for-profit organisations. The Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust, [MAST](#), is a champion for underwater maritime heritage and advocacy; and [OceanMind](#), is an award-winning expert in satellite-based surveillance and maritime domain awareness. The partnership represents a novel, holistic approach to the deterrence of illegal activity at sea to combine both monitoring and detection of illegal fishing activities and the looting of known shipwreck sites.

About the Information and Heritage Inspectorate

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The Information and Heritage Inspectorate ensures compliance with the law and promotes improvements to the management and care of cultural heritage. When necessary, the Inspectorate takes action in the event of incidents and calamities. The Inspectorate is an independent body which reports its findings objectively. It also advises the [Minister of Culture](#) on the quality and effectiveness of the legislation.

About the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

The [Cultural Heritage Agency](#) is the Netherlands' centre of expertise for heritage. Heritage care is a public interest, for which the government also takes responsibility. The Cultural Heritage Agency is an executive body of the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science. Its tasks go beyond merely preserving and protecting buildings, archaeological sites and works of art. Today, society devotes increasing attention to how cultural historical values can be given a place within spatial development plans and projects. Doing so ensures that we can give the future a recognisable past.

About MAST

MAST is a registered UK charity, founded in 2011 by maritime archaeologist and author Jessica Berry, to address the gap in the way our maritime underwater cultural heritage (UCH) is protected in contrast to terrestrial archaeology. It is considered to be the foremost maritime archaeological organisation in the UK, providing full-cycle maritime archaeological capability, from discovery, excavation and conservation to the museum door. MAST exists to fill a long standing void in our understanding of our nation's rich maritime heritage, to ensure that there is a sustainable future for such sites, through archaeology, research, study, dissemination and education. MAST maintains a privileged position as a member accredited to the governing bodies of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

About OceanMind

OceanMind is an award-winning not-for-profit UK-based organisation that until now has focused purely on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. It is an impact-oriented company that empowers enforcement and compliance to protect the world's fisheries. It provides insights and intelligence into fishing compliance to those who can most effectively use it. It supports government authorities and seafood buyers by providing expertise and knowledge allied with advanced technologies to enable responsible sourcing and effective enforcement. Effective enforcement drives deterrence and increased compliance. This combined with the power of the market choosing provably responsible sources, drives sustainability.

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