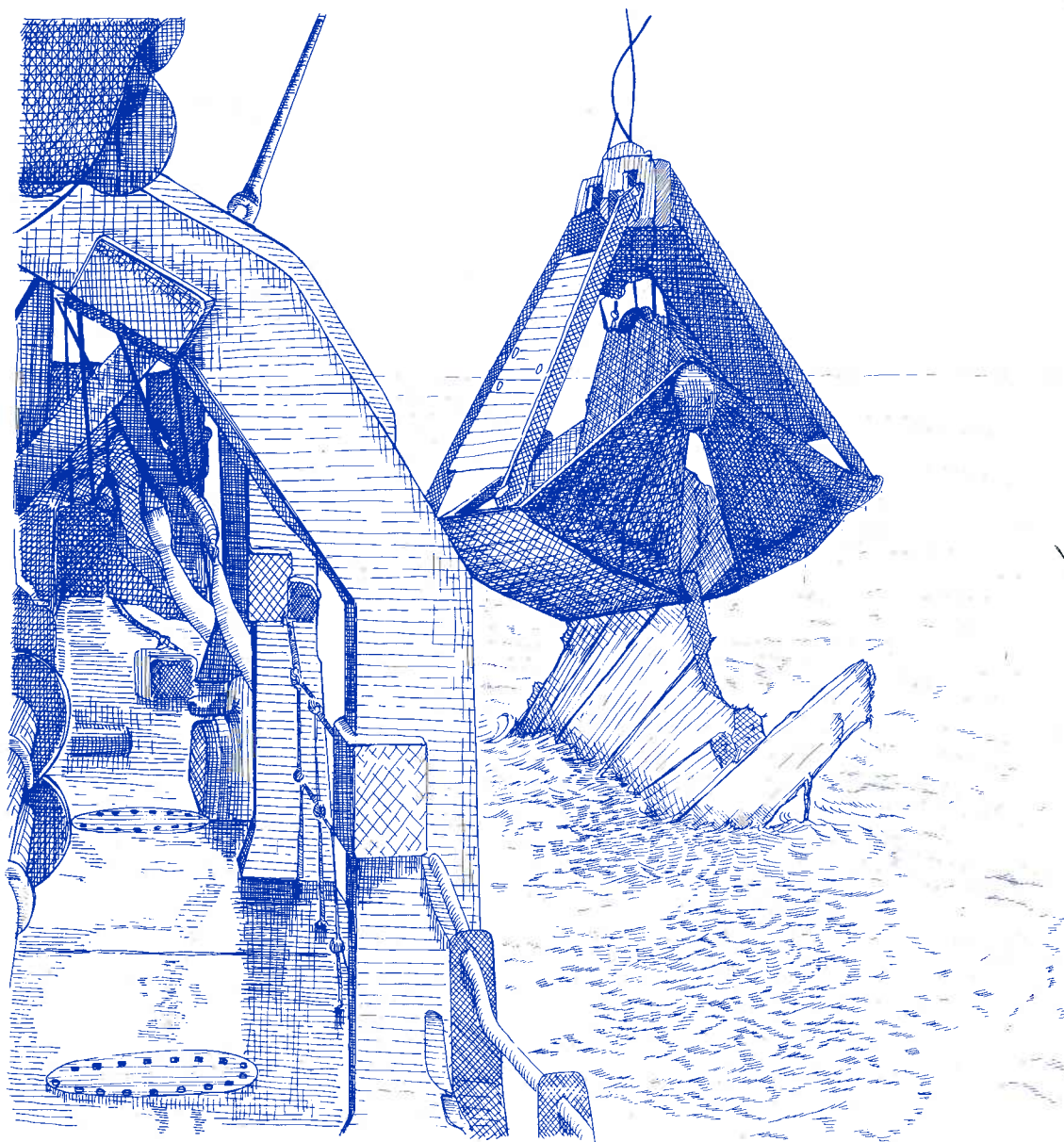


# HERITAGE AT SEA

Proposals for the better protection  
of archaeological sites underwater



Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee

May 1989

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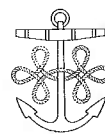
## **Proposals for the better protection of archaeological sites underwater.**

The proposals contained in this document have been compiled by representatives from several bodies with an interest in preserving Britain's heritage and especially those parts of it which lie under the sea, the National Maritime Museum, the Nautical Archaeology Society, the Council for British Archaeology, the Institute of Field Archaeologists and the Society for Nautical Research. The proposals represent a consensus of involved opinion, achieved through extensive discussions and public debate.

Compiled by The Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee.

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The cover illustration by Caroline Caldwell shows the recent salvage of an East Indiaman from the Thames Estuary.

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The principle underlying these proposals is that archaeological sites of national importance underwater should receive no less protection than those on land.

R1. New legislation, specifically drafted for the protection of underwater archaeological sites and the artefacts associated with them, and covering all aspects of the underwater cultural heritage, should be enacted as soon as possible.

R2. An inventory of underwater sites within territorial waters should be compiled and maintained at a national and local level. A set of criteria for assessing the importance of sites should be established and the sites should be graded accordingly.

R3. The payments, required by the Merchant Shipping Act 1894, of fees and VAT, based on the market value of items raised from the seabed, should be waived in the case of items which are to be kept in publicly accessible collections. This should include all finds from sites which are statutorily protected.

R4. Commercial seabed operators and statutory undertakers active on the seabed should be encouraged to carry out archaeological implication surveys before the seabed is disturbed and co-operate with archaeologists during potentially destructive work. They should be encouraged to contribute to the costs of rescue excavation of threatened sites.

R5. The Ministry of Defence, who have responsibility for historic naval wrecks, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who are responsible for East India Company property in wrecks, should acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities. They should enter into proper consultation with archaeological bodies before disposing of property from underwater. In the long term they should consider transferring the administration of these cultural resources to the maritime heritage protection agency proposed in recommendation six.

R6. The new legislation should provide for the establishment of a maritime heritage protection agency which should carry out and co-ordinate the survey work necessary for the inventory; assess the importance of sites; arrange for the protection of sites by buoying and burial; process applications for licences to carry out work on sites and co-ordinate archaeological diver training and public education.

R7. In the short term, better use should be made of existing legislation to protect underwater sites and effective arrangements should be made for the reporting of artefacts recovered from the seabed.

