

## **National legislations of Sri Lanka and UNESCO convention on the protection of the underwater cultural heritage 2001**

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Maritime Archaeological Heritage of Sri Lanka significantly came into consideration with the discovery of an English shipwreck with a cargo of silver coins from the Great Basses reef, 12 km off the south-east coast of Sri Lanka in 1961. Since then the Department of Archaeology has gradually focused on taking action to preserve the rich underwater archaeological heritage of this country. Amendments made to the 'Antiquity Ordinance' in 1998 and 2001 facilitate the protection of underwater archaeological heritage in territorial waters to a considerable degree. Also the 'Maritime Cultural Heritage Authority Bill' most positively fills the areas that the existing legislation does not cover. 1982 The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea III 1982 was ratified by Sri Lanka in 1994. In 2001 the UNESCO adopted Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and now Sri Lanka is considering it for ratification.

This study will discuss to what extent Sri Lankan legislations ensure the protection of underwater cultural heritage and maintain balance between the Heritage and sustainable development of coastal areas. Second issue is about the ratification of the UNESCO Convention first or to amend the 'Maritime Cultural Heritage Authority Bill' prior to ratification.

**key words:** Maritime Archaeology, National legislation, Underwater cultural heritage, UNESCO convention 2001, Coastal areas

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