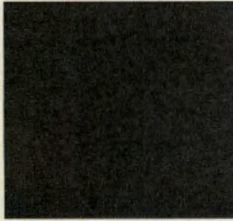


Admiral Sir George Zambellas KCB DSC ADC DL



Ministry of Defence
5th Floor, Section K
Main Building
Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB
Telephone: [REDACTED]
Fax: [REDACTED]

CNS/1/6/1/4



19 March 2014

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter of the 6th January in which you raise several important issues about the protection and commemoration of Royal Navy wrecks. My apologies for the delay in replying, but I wished to understand the subject in greater detail before I did so.

Let me begin by saying that I welcome the support of the Joint Nautical Archaeological Policy Committee for Royal Navy heritage. I am very aware of the importance of linking the past with today's Navy – and indeed the future Royal Navy – and we never forget the achievements made, and losses suffered, by our forebears.

Let me also reiterate Government policy, which I fully support, that our military wrecks should be offered appropriate protection and management. As you know, this policy seeks to promote the sustainable management of British Military Wrecks incorporating existing legal measures where relevant but advocating modern heritage management principles, through collaboration with other participants and stakeholders.

A military wreck should remain undisturbed and a 'look but don't touch approach' respected until options on future protection or management have been agreed. As you note, under International Law, naval warships and associated artefacts enjoy protection through Sovereign Immunity, and this is the baseline assumption, augmented by other legislation, for all British Wrecks lost on military service. Military Wrecks may also be offered protection through the Protection of Military Remains Act (PMRA) (1986) but as you noted in your letter, it only applies to UK passport holders and UK flagged vessels.

The UK's underwater heritage policies are in line with the Rules set out in the Annex to the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. Though not currently a signatory to the UNESCO Convention, the Government has adopted the principles set out in its Annex as best practice in the archaeological and cultural management of underwater sites and artefacts. Anybody wishing to access a military wreck must agree to uphold the general principles of the UNESCO Annex – a point I will return to in relation to HMS VICTORY (1744).

It is this legislative and policy framework in which we operate, and I acknowledge that it is not as strong in some areas as one might wish. And there is also the simple reality that the sheer number of wrecks – and their dispersed locations around the globe – means that we are unable, physically, to do as much as we might wish to. But we do what we can, and the Royal Navy will continue to play its part.

Turning to the specific issues that you raised, I am aware of the work being undertaken with respect to potential ratification of the UNESCO Convention. The Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence will contribute to the cross Government consideration of the findings/recommendations of the Impact Review.

The loss of HM Ships CRESSY, HOGUE and ABOUKIR was the second single largest loss of WW1, and it is right that the 100th anniversary is marked. Plans for a commemoration at The Historic Dockyard Chatham on 22 September are well advanced and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines will contribute to the day. With respect to the wrecks themselves, Navy Command is engaged with colleagues in the Netherlands and German Navies to see what more could be done to protect the sites, and they are under consideration for designation under PMRA. The Royal Navy is unlikely to be represented at the Scientific Conference in Bruges that you mention, but I wish you well for your presentation.

The event in Chatham, and those for the Battle of Jutland that you also mention, are but a few of the many that the Royal Navy will be participating in over the next four years. We are fully engaged in the commemoration planning for major events under the direction of the Minister for International Security Strategy, Dr Murrison MP, and we are seeking to maximise our engagement though attendance of personnel and ships wherever we can recognising, of course, that we have a full programme of current operational commitments as well. Through all this we are well advised on the historical significance of any event by the Naval Historical Branch and the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

I mentioned HMS VICTORY (1744) and I know that you have a keen interest in, and are a regular correspondent, on this issue. I can tell you that the recent meetings between Ministers and the Maritime Heritage Foundation (MHF) were well received by both parties and officials are now considering revised proposals from MHF. The Government's position, which I am sure you will be very familiar with, has not changed – and any proposal for the management of the site needs to follow marine archaeological best practice as set out in the UNESCO Convention.

I hope that what I have written reassures you that the Royal Navy takes a full part in matters of Naval heritage and commemoration. Plans for WW1 anniversaries are well advanced and we await with interest the publication of the UNESCO Convention Impact Review and the advice of the Advisory Group on MHF's latest Project Design for VICTORY (1744).

More sincerely,



Copy to:

Navy Command – Command Sec (Mr Giles Ahern)