

The World Archaeological Congress expresses its serious concern about draft legislation concerning underwater cultural heritage that is currently being considered by the Colombian Parliament to regulate articles 63, 70 and 72 of the Politic Constitution of the Republic of Colombia. According to local and foreign specialists, this project opens up the prospect for private, underwater treasure hunting, to the detriment of scientific investigations and cultural heritage conservation.

In 2008, after the Sixth World Archaeological Congress held in Dublin, Ireland, all nations were encouraged to recognize the importance of all maritime and underwater archaeological sites in their waters regardless of original cultural affiliation, country of origin or history. Professor Claire Smith, the President of WAC, stated that “it is necessary to mitigate for natural and human impacts on underwater cultural heritage and to develop and promote structures and capacity to enable sustainable use and common stewardship of that heritage”.

In this sense, the World Archaeological Congress respectfully urges the Government and members of the Parliament of the Republic of Colombia to fulfil its mission to protect and preserve the underwater heritage in inland and marine territorial waters, for the benefit of present and future generations by excluding the possibility of commercial exploitation in any underwater investigation.

The World Archaeological Congress, therefore, calls upon the Colombian government to draft a new proposal that prevents the exploitation and appropriation of objects from underwater sites and treasure hunters. “It is necessary to include academic institutions representing archaeology and anthropology, museums, indigenous communities and other members of civil society in such important decisions”, declared Professor Claire Smith.

The resolution underlying this press release was proposed by participants in the Ethics at WAC-7 and beyond Session at the Seventh World Archaeological Congress, held in the Dead Sea, Jordan, 13th-18th January, followed by meetings of the World Archaeological Congress Council and Executive.