



THE COMPATIBILITY OF HERITAGE PROTECTION AND FISHING PRACTICE

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Fishing has been one of the major reasons for humanity to roam the coasts and venture at sea. Fishing sites are important archaeological sites and all other sites at sea have been impacted by fishing through the ages. Net weights and fishing hooks from all periods following a site's formation are the typical add-on to any assemblage and a telling source of knowledge both on fishing and on the site in question. Fishing is therefore an inseparable part of maritime archaeology. However, the relationship of present-day archaeologists with modern fishermen is a bit more ambiguous than with their forebears. There is a very positive side to it. Fishermen have local knowledge which is indispensable for maritime archaeologists. Moreover, they are the prime discoverers of sites, or at least they have been until swath bathymetry and integration of geophysical databases became available and fishing techniques were adapted to consume less fuel and thus to impact the sea bottom less. But the impact of bottom fisheries on the seabed has been an undeniable factor long before heritage protection was considered a serious issue, and continues to be so now that it is. It is a situation with uncomfortable side effects, as it used as an excuse for less than responsible heritage approaches. And more often than not, there is little communication and understanding between fishermen and archaeologists working in the same area. Harsh reproaches are sometimes the result, whereas an open dialogue and relationship of heritage professionals and professionals in the fishing industry would be more helpful.