

Department of Marine Ecosystems and Society Seminar Series

Our Ocean World Heritage: Titanic and Other Cultural Natural Sites Ole Varmer Ocean Foundation

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Abstract: We are all connected by the ocean. We depend on it for food, recreation and many livelihoods. The ocean's natural and cultural resources are part of the world heritage to be preserved for present and future generations. The public interest in preserving this ocean heritage is evident in international and US law. The 1972 World Heritage Convention started recognizing natural and cultural places of "outstanding universal value" on land has evolved to recognize the importance of conserving such heritage found at sea. While the focus over the first couple of decades was on terrestrial sites, over the past couple of decades the interest has included marine resources and sites as evidenced in the listing of the Dugong (Manatees) by Japan or the inscription of Papahānaumokuākea (a Marine National Monument established under the Antiquities Act). Under US law, setting aside special marine areas with significant natural and cultural resources started with the Marine Protection Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (now more commonly known as the National Marine Sanctuaries Act). This presentation will provide an overview of the development and implementation of the international and US law protecting the natural and cultural resources in the ocean and views on some suggested next steps including cooperation at the international level through UNESCO such as World Heritage Sites in the high seas such as Titanic and the Sargasso Sea.

Bio: Ole Varmer has over 30 years of legal experience in international and United States environmental and historic preservation law. Most recently, he was the legal expert on the UNESCO team that produced the Evaluation Report of the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2019). Ole graduated from the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law in 1987 with the honor of being the Editor-in-Chief of the International Law Students Association (ILSA) International Law Journal. He worked for almost 33 years at the Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration where he developed his expertise in the Law of the Sea, marine environmental law, maritime law and heritage law (natural and cultural). Ole represented NOAA on the U.S. Delegation to UNESCO meetings on Underwater Cultural Heritage, World Heritage, the 1st World Congress on Maritime Heritage and Intergovernmental Oceanographic Committee meetings regarding the Governance of Large Marine Ecosystems. In the 1990s he played a leading role in the multi-lateral negotiation of the International Agreement on Titanic, implementing Guidelines, and legislation. Ole was also the lead attorney in establishing several Marine Protected Areas that protect natural and cultural heritage, including the Florida Keys, Stellwagen Bank, and Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuaries including several cases successfully defending the application of environmental/heritage laws against challenges under the law of salvage. Ole was the lead NOAA attorney in litigation involving the USS Monitor, and historic shipwrecks in the Florida Keys and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries. Ole has dozens of legal publications concerning the preservation of our cultural and natural heritage. He is now a Senior Fellow at The Ocean Foundation assisting in the integration of UCH into the work and mission of that non-profit organization

