Protocol Identification of Human Remains

1. Location
2. Document objects
3. Document context
4. Secure
5. Identify stakeholders
6. Inform relevant authorities
7. Leave location undisturbed
8. Consult
9. Report to local authorities
10. Storage
11. Follow up

This is the Protocol Identification of Human Remains during underwater archeological projects.

This protocol should be used as an aid, a guideline, for when human remains are being discovered on an archaeological site underwater.

With this protocol not everything can be covered, much also comes back to the common sense of the archaeological excavation crew.

Not all sites need exactly the same treatment, however it is important to have a strategy in place for when human remains are being discovered, regardless the age of the site.

Click on the items in the diagram for more information.

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1

Register the location of the site and the human remains within. Use coordinates.

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2

Document bones and related objects like shoes, helmets, etc *in situ*. Measure and take photographs.

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Document the environment of the location, as part of the larger archaeological site.

Government of the Netherlands

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Secure the materials or secure the location. Add protection if necessary, if needed mark the find area.

If possible, do not remove the materials from the site. Only in immediate danger of loss or damage this can be considered. See also point 7.

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Identify stakeholders. Make sure you know who needs to be involved in the research, gaining permission for handling the remains and/or the dissemination of information.

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Inform the relevant authorities
Local, national and international authorities if needed.

It is important to keep the authorities in the loop. They are a special stakeholder group, nationally and internationally especially important when we deal with Worldwar wrecks.

For example:

- *Netherlands:*
  - Embassy
    For recent war remains:
  - Bergings- en Identificatiedienst Koninklijke Landmacht (BIDKL)
  - Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE)

- *Source country:*
  Relevant organisations like the archaeological coordinating units or specific defense organisations like:
  - The Australian Unrecovered War Casualties-Army (UWC-A),
  - Department of Communications and the Arts
    Or United States:
  - Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)
  - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

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7

Especially when dealing with WWI and WWII sites, **leave the human remains in place** unless it has been specifically discussed they can be removed.

For other periods this may be less urgent and should be left to the judgement of the project leader. However, be aware that also handling older human remains may be sensitive (for example the bones of enslaved in land graves as well as in wrecks).

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Consult and discuss with salvage and identification experts if the objects and remains can be salvage and brought ashore. Specific way of treatment may be needed in order - for example - not to compromise the material before sampling.

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Report to local authorities and if needed other stakeholders as mentioned under point 5 and 6.

Report about what has been done and what will be done with the remains. Make sure you plan in some time for feedback and flexibility if the authorities decide otherwise. This may change your own plan or causes delay in order to have time to discuss with authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

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Make agreements on **storage**, research and possible repositioning of the objects.

Important are:
– Authorities
– Client
– Other identified stakeholders
– Designated depot

It can be decided not to put the human remains in an archaeological depot. Other options are for example, a scientific institute or a cemetery (in case of reburial). This has to be decided among the relevant stakeholders, the client and the excavator.

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Discuss **follow up** with the relevant stakeholders that have been identified within the process (at point 5).