

**Contact Information**

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**Willing to Attend Workshop?**

Yes

**Target Name/Area of Interest**

RMS *Titanic*

**Geographic Area of Interest**

North Atlantic

**Relevant Subject Areas**

Marine Archaeology  
Chemistry  
Biology

**Description of Topic Recommended for Exploration**

Next year will mark nine years since the last mission to RMS *Titanic* and fifteen years since the last NOAA mission to *Titanic*. This is the longest gap in the history of missions to this significant deep ocean shipwreck since its discovery in 1985. A variety of questions can be posed that address the iconic site's condition, stability, and continued environmental processes active at the wreck:

- What are the changes to the site since 2010?
- What are the changes that have occurred because of *Titanic's* bacteriological colonization and consumption?
- What other natural and anthropogenic processes have changed or impacted the wreck?
- Have there been undocumented, clandestine visits to the wreck, and if so, what impacts has such activity caused? and
- Are there changes in the surrounding terrain, and the physical and chemical oceanography since the 2004 mission measured them?

In addition to the scientific questions, there is also a compelling argument that NOAA undertake a mission to observe *Titanic* for legal and administrative reasons. Since the discovery of the wreck site in 1985, NOAA has been involved in protecting and preserving the site in some capacity, from participating in exploration and scientific missions to negotiating international agreements. In 1985, Congress recognized the shipwreck as a site of "national and international cultural and historical significance" in need of international protection and enacted the **R.M.S. Titanic Maritime Memorial Act of 1986** (1986 Act), signed by President Reagan. The 1986 Act encouraged NOAA and the United States Department of State to (1) negotiate an **international agreement** (International Agreement) to protect *Titanic*; and (2) develop international **guidelines** (NOAA Guidelines) for exploration, research, and, if determined appropriate, salvage. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia recognized the public interest in *Titanic* and NOAA's role in overseeing activities of the salvor, R.M.S. Titanic, Inc. NOAA has designated its Office of General Counsel and its Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to implement the Court's directives. Today, the United States Departments of Justice, State, and Commerce (primarily through NOAA), and other interested federal agencies continue work to:

- Implement the International Agreement that the U.S. signed in 2004, subject to the enactment of domestic legislation, including the recognition of the wreck as an international maritime memorial and providing the authority to ensure that it continues to be respected as the resting place of those who lost their lives in its sinking;
- Prohibit potentially harmful activities directed at RMS *Titanic*, such as looting and unwanted salvage;
- Establish a permitting system to manage any research, exploration, recovery, or salvage of RMS *Titanic* in accordance with scientific rules;
- Require the application of current professional standards of scientific and archaeological resource management to ensure that RMS *Titanic* is properly preserved and conserved for present and future generations; and
- Create an advisory council to make recommendations to the United States Secretary of Commerce regarding the protection and long-term management of the wreck site, as well as the conservation and curation of any artifacts recovered.

The 100th Anniversary of the sinking of the RMS *Titanic* on April 15, 2012 triggered significant interest in the wreck site. On January 31, 2012, in response to a request from NOAA, the U.S. National Park Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the International Maritime Organization issued a circular on *Titanic*. The circular advised all vessels to refrain from discharging any garbage, waste, or effluent in a zone approximately 10 nm (34 km) above the wreck. It also requested that submersibles avoid landing on the *Titanic's* deck and concentrate the release of any drop weights on ascent in specific areas away from the hull portions of the wreck. The circular also requested that visitors refrain from placing plaques or other permanent memorials on the wreck, however well-intentioned. As of April 15, 2012, the RMS *Titanic* wreck came under the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

On May 5, 2017, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31) was signed into law. Section 113 of the Act provides:

For fiscal year 2017 and each fiscal year thereafter, no person shall conduct any research, exploration, salvage, or other activity that would physically alter or disturb the wreck or wreck site of the RMS *Titanic* unless authorized by the Secretary of Commerce per the provisions of the Agreement Concerning the Shipwrecked Vessel RMS *Titanic*. The Secretary of Commerce shall take appropriate actions to carry out this section consistent with the Agreement.

Under Article 4 of the Agreement, each party is to take “appropriate actions” to enforce measures taken pursuant to the Agreement against its nationals and vessels flying its flag and to prohibit activities in its territory including its maritime ports, territorial sea, and offshore terminals, that are inconsistent with the Agreement.

With this as background, and with ongoing Congressionally-mandated responsibilities, and NOAA’s role in leading and participating in three scientific expeditions to *Titanic*, a 2019 mission is recommended, in addition to scientific observation and documentation, to:

1. Conduct an oversight inspection of the wreck;
2. Conduct a telepresence-enabled mission to make the first live inspection of the wreck by the United States District Court, which exercises authority and oversight on *Titanic* through Admiralty, and also to provide a live inspection and briefing to Congress.
3. To conduct a NOAA-led inspection for the public in what would be the first telepresence-enabled mission to *Titanic*, and involve both Dr. Robert Ballard, as discoverer of the wreck and leader of the 1986 mission and as chief scientist for the 2004 mission, as well as the SEARCH, Inc. team, which includes Dr. Delgado as the chief scientist for the last (2010) mission to the wreck.

In addition to Dr. Ballard and Dr. Delgado, the team, which could take the science lead ashore, include Mr. Arbuthnot, who led the documentation dives to the wreck and into the wreck for James Cameron, and Dr. Brennan, who was the archaeological lead and expedition coordinator for Dr. Ballard’s Ocean Exploration Trust.

The mission to *Titanic* would take one to two days of ROV operations to assess the bow, stern and the intermediate artifact field. It would yield new observations, demonstrate ongoing NOAA and U.S. Government involvement as laid out by Congress and the courts, and be an exciting mission with broad appeal to demonstrate the role of telepresence-enabled exploration of arguably the world’s best-known shipwreck and NOAA’s role and leadership in deep ocean exploration to what could well be the largest telepresence audience in the history of NOAA’s ocean exploration missions.

### **Relevant Partnerships**

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (OER, ONMS MHP, GCIL)

Ocean Exploration Trust  
University of Rhode Island GSO  
Department of Justice