

Western Australian Museum and the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage

The award for a discrete project recognises an exemplary collaboration between the Western Australian Museum (WAM) and the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage (NRIMCH) in South Korea.

The project has reached across and under the oceans to undertake joint research, share current and acquired knowledge, and contribute skills to maritime cultural activities, specifically underwater excavation and materials conservation of maritime archaeological objects.

In 2010, the WAM was invited by the NRIMCH to collaborate in joint research project and personnel exchanges. As the NRIMCH in Mokpo, South Korea had already established academic ties with other foreign professional underwater research organisations, including the administration of the Penglaige (Penglai City, China), Guang Dong Provincial Institute of Culture Relics and Archaeology (China), Quanzhou Maritime Museum of China and the National Museum of Vietnamese History, the invitation was considered a valuable opportunity for the WAM. It was particularly exciting for the WAM to be the first institution in Australia presented with this opportunity. The approach by the NRIMCH recognizes and further endorses the national and international reputation of the WAM, particularly for its ability and achievements in maritime archaeology and associated conservation research and treatments.

The aim of the collaboration is to conduct joint research, share current and acquired knowledge, contribute skills and in this process further develop and promote the investigation and conservation management of maritime / underwater cultural heritage sites and artefacts. Following an initial visit to the NRIMCH by Dr. Ian Godfrey, then Head of the WAM's Department of Materials Conservation and a follow-up visit to Western Australia by the senior Korean representatives, Mr. Nack-Jun Seong (Chief) and Dr. Whan-suk Moon (Division Chief), it was agreed that the exchange programme would be undertaken for a duration of three years (2011 to 2013). Under the agreement each participant in the programme was to stay for up to four weeks with the host organisation to work on joint research, excavation and conservation activities. The flexible programme is designed to provide the participants with cross-cultural learning opportunities to broaden their professional exposure, enhance their skills and further their professional development across a range of specializations in the field of maritime heritage and culture.

The first exchange took place in early 2011 when Mr. Seong-tae Lim, a conservator from the NRIMCH, worked for one month with staff in the WAM conservation laboratories. Mr. Lim was initially given a broad introduction to maritime archaeological conservation practices, with an emphasis on treatments applied to metals. A specific aim of his visit was to determine the optimum treatment for a large number of copper alloy coins recovered from the sea in Korea, examples of which were brought to Western Australia for treatment trials. Two conservators from the WAM participated in the return exchange, where the

timing of each visit was primarily arranged to permit conservator Mr. Jon Carpenter to participate in maritime archaeological excavations near Mado Island, Taeon, and for conservator Ms Carmela Corvala to present a paper at the International Ceramics Conference, Mokpo as well as conducting collaborative work in the NRMCH conservation laboratory.

Whilst the project was developed to operate for three years from 2011 to 2013, due to the many successful outcomes to date all the parties have been spurred on to continue with further initiatives. This has included the publication of several research papers with joint authorship between the South Korean and the Australian conservators.

A particularly significant outcome is that the research collaboration continues as the result of a further three-year memorandum of understanding being signed by the CEO of the WAM, Alec Coles, and his Korean counterparts

The WAM's involvement with the Korean Institute enables the Museum to extend its contact with its Korean neighbours, while concurrently allowing Korea to expand its influence into the wider Australasian region. This partnership in the preservation of cultural heritage in our region has been and continues to be mutually beneficial, and provides an effective and successful model for others in the museum community.

The project importantly will have a lasting impact, and will leave a memorable and valuable legacy in further developing and promoting the investigation and conservation management of maritime and underwater cultural heritage sites and artefacts.