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"Community-based Conservation of Leatherback Turtles in Solomon Islands: Local Responses to Global Pressures"

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The population of Leatherback Sea Turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in the western Pacific has experienced dramatic declines over the past two decades. The full extent of these declines and the current status of the western Pacific sub-population remains unclear due to the remote nature of these nesting beaches. Zaira, on the southern coast of Vangunu Island in the Western Province of Solomon Islands is a previously undocumented nesting ground for Leatherback Sea Turtles. Whilst leatherbacks in this area have traditionally been harvested by the local communities, the Zaira community independently initiated a full closure over leatherbacks in 1999 as a response to reducing numbers. This study provides an overview of the scientific and traditional knowledge that the Zaira community has used to underpin their community-based management regime of Leatherback Sea Turtles. The community self-initiated the construction of a leatherback hatchery that was able to replicate the ideal nesting temperature for balanced sex ratios. Furthermore, the community developed a nest monitoring and satellite telemetry programme to provide a regional context to their conservation efforts. This community-led approach highlights the important role local communities can play in the conservation of this iconic species. (Text from authors' abstract)

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