



UPWELL

PROTECTING TURTLES AT SEA

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My name is George Shillinger. I am the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Upwell Turtles. Our mission is to protect endangered marine turtles by reducing threats at sea. I am also a founding board member and Treasurer of the international research organization, Migramar. I am honored to have the opportunity to present this statement at the United Nations World Ocean Conference.

Upwell collaborates with many public and private sector partners to counter declines in imperiled sea turtle populations worldwide. In the Pacific our efforts focus on providing the science necessary to inform management and conservation efforts aimed at promoting the recovery of critically endangered leatherback turtles. Protecting leatherbacks provides multi-species benefits to sharks, marine mammals, seabirds, and other sea turtle species that occupy similar habitats and whose behavior is driven by similar environmental variables.

In the Pacific, the two discrete breeding stocks of leatherback turtles will likely become functionally extinct within decades absent a sharp reduction in fisheries bycatch and an exploration of the merits of bold interventions such as rewilding. These two populations include the West Pacific leatherbacks (nesting in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, now extirpated from Malaysia), whose numbers have declined more than 80 percent in the past three decades, and the East Pacific leatherbacks (nesting from southern Baja CA, Mexico to northern Ecuador) whose numbers have declined even more precipitously, exceeding 97 percent within the same time frame.

Upwell uses innovative technologies to inform conservation measures, including marine protected area design, bycatch mitigation strategies, and the development of novel transboundary and high-seas adaptive management approaches. We employ multiple data sets, including electronic tag derived movement and environmental data, remotely sensed environmental and human impacts data, fisheries observer data, and quantitative and qualitative data provide by citizen scientists and stakeholder communities.

Our aim is to ensure the recovery and continued persistence of leatherbacks in the Pacific Ocean, and to support efforts to sustain and recover populations of all seven sea turtle species worldwide. The work of both Upwell and Migramar is highly relevant to Scaling up Ocean Action Based on Science and Innovation for the Implementation of SDG 14. To further SDG 14, Upwell is committing \$750,000 over 2 years to support monitoring of critically endangered Pacific leatherback turtle populations in key foraging and breeding habitats and along migratory corridors and swimways.