About 26,000 people live in Choiseul Province, or Lauru by its local name, in the Solomon Islands. Due to its remoteness, people in Lauru depend heavily on natural resources for food and income. The area boasts the largest remaining stands of lowland rainforest and more plant and animal species than any other island in the Solomon archipelago. Its unique marine biodiversity calls for preservation—a task that the Lauru Ridges to Reefs Protected Area Network takes care of.

The Lauru Ridges to Reefs Protected Area Network is the first locally managed marine area network in Melanesia. The network helps to strengthen the ownership and responsibility of local communities. It provides them with a systematic approach and useful tools to develop their own conservation plans, so that they can create protected areas and achieve legal security over access rights.

Jimmy Kereseka, member of the Lauru Land Conference of Tribal Community (LLCTC):

“LLCTC is the representative organisation of the collective chiefs of all communities in Lauru. It was established in 1981 and has given the people of Lauru a strong voice. A couple of years ago we decided to join forces in order to make more wise and informed choices about our future—which is especially urgent given the pressures from logging, rising water levels, decreasing natural resources and increasing exploration by mining companies. Therefore, in 2008 LLCTC together with the provincial government requested support from The Nature Conservancy in order to better protect the land and seas of Lauru. The result was a provincial master conservation plan. This plan has been the foundation for the development of the 18 marine and terrestrial protected areas that have been established in Lauru so far.”

Rich in natural resources: Lauru in the Solomon Islands

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Developing the conservation plan with the help of 3D modelling

Conservation plan built on local and scientific knowledge

Through a participatory process, all relevant stakeholders map key features, cultural heritage and ecosystem services. MPA planning software identifies options for cost-effective protected area networks. 3D modelling is used to link local knowledge and scientific findings.

Integration of protected area sites into network

Once the conservation plan, the sites’ conservation value and the community’s commitment are approved by LLCTC, a new site is added to the Lauru network. A management committee formed by the community oversees and manages the new protected area.

Overseeing implementation of the network

An overall committee made up of representatives of all stakeholders meets twice a year to review the implementation and progress at different sites in accordance with the conservation master plan.

Monitoring of protected areas

The community’s management committee ensures continuous monitoring of protected areas. Interested community members are trained in monitoring using standardised techniques.

Alternative livelihoods

Where feasible, LLCTC explores options of developing alternative incomes in order to counter possible negative impacts of resource use limitations. Eco-tourism or eco-timber (including honey bee projects) are such alternatives.

This solution is being implemented by Lauru Land Conference of Tribal Community (LLCTC), the Government of Choiseul province and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)