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ICJ confirms Aust to return Timor docs

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The United Nation's top court has confirmed it's authorised Australia to return documents seized from a lawyer representing East Timor in a dispute over a controversial oil and gas treaty between the two countries.

Dili took Canberra to the International Court of Justice in The Hague seeking the return of sensitive documents seized by ASIO during a December 2013 raid on lawyer Bernard Collaery's Canberra office.

In late March 2015 Australia indicated it wished to return the documents.

"The court considers that it should now authorise such return while maintaining the obligation for Australia to keep under seal that material until its transfer has been completed under the supervision of a representative appointed for that purpose by Timor-Leste," the ICJ said in an order dated April 22 but only made public on Wednesday.

The court requested Australia and East Timor inform the ICJ when the documents have been returned.

They relate to East Timor's challenge to the Treaty on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea.

Dili has accused Canberra of bugging its cabinet office during 2004 treaty negotiations.

In an interim order in March 2014 the ICJ ordered Australia not to use the documents and keep them under lock and key until further notice.

The court also banned Canberra from spying on communications between Dili and its

Earlier this week East Timor's government issued a statement saying it appreciated Canberra's decision to return the seized documents.

"After 16 months of vigorously defending its right to take and keep the documents the Australian government has now written to the ICJ stating that it wishes to return them," the statement said.

"On 22 April the court responded to the Australian letter authorising the return of the documents, still sealed, under the supervision of a representative of Timor-Leste."

Dili on Monday said it was reserving its rights on the broader dispute over the maritime treaty.

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