

# THE SATURDAY PAPER

LETTERS  
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## Australia stands by Timor treaties

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I refer to recent articles about the Timor Sea arrangements published in *The Saturday Paper* (“Hamish McDonald, “Australia called to Hague on Timor Gap”, June 13-19; Steve Bracks, “Timor Sea policy a challenge for Labor”, July 11-17). I am concerned that readers of *The Saturday Paper* will have been left with the impression that Australia’s Timor Sea policies are inconsistent with international law and unfair to Timor-Leste. This is not the case. Australia and Timor-Leste both claim the seabed of the Timor Sea and, in negotiations on the location of a permanent maritime boundary, were unable to reconcile overlapping claims. To resolve this impasse, Australia and Timor-Leste concluded three treaties that provide for the co-operative development of the oil and gas resources of the Timor Sea. In the treaties, we also agreed to defer maritime boundary delimitation for up to 50 years to develop the resources and provide long-term certainty for investors. Far from being inconsistent with international law or undermining sovereignty, this type of provisional arrangement is actively encouraged by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Our ability to put aside competing claims and pursue joint development is cited internationally as a good model. The treaties have allowed Timor-Leste to accumulate almost \$US17 billion in its petroleum fund, enabling it to press ahead with much-needed economic development without waiting years for permanent boundaries to be resolved. Much of the current attention is focused on the development of the Greater Sunrise gas fields, where we have agreed to split the upstream revenue 50/50. It is often claimed that a median line would be an equitable solution, and that this would put Greater Sunrise in Timorese waters. Such claims ignore the fact that the application of median line principles would leave no more than 20.1 per cent of Greater Sunrise in Timorese jurisdiction, resulting in substantially less revenue for Timor-Leste than provided for in the current treaties. Australia takes its treaty obligations seriously, and we believe in sticking to our agreements. We negotiated the Timor Sea treaties in good faith and remain committed to them.

– Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Parliament House, Canberra