

## East Timor 'reactivates' bid for new maritime boundary with Australia

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An espionage operation by Australia's foreign spy service underpins a new bid by East Timor to establish a maritime boundary between the two countries and gain a bigger share of the lucrative Timor Sea oil and gas fields.

Australia's tiny neighbour said on Wednesday it would reactivate arbitration proceedings in The Hague to nullify the treaty governing the \$40 billion in oil and gas deposits and force Australia to negotiate a new boundary.

The long-standing dispute between Australia and East Timor took a dramatic turn in 2013 when it emerged the Australian Secret Intelligence Service had installed listening devices in East Timor's government offices during treaty talks in 2004.

The revelations from a former senior ASIS officer who oversaw the operation prompted the government to authorise [ASIO raids](#) on the ex-spy, as well as East Timor's Canberra-based lawyer Bernard Collaery, seizing documents and data.

After legal action was taken in the International Court of Justice, Australia [returned the documents](#) from Mr Collaery's home and office 16 months after they were taken in the raids.

East Timor, also known as Timor-Leste, will now drop its action in the ICJ, to the dismay of some of its supporters.

However, it will restart the underlying arbitration case over the Treaty on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea (CMATS), which came into effect in 2007.

In a statement on Wednesday, Prime Minister Rui Araujo said the country would "reactivate" the arbitration, which has been paused since September last year to allow the two parties to reach a settlement privately.

"Timor-Leste's expectation that the dialogue would produce a road map for structured talks on the delimitation of permanent maritime boundaries has not been met," the statement said.

The former ASIS operative, known as Witness K, was East Timor's key witness in the arbitration but his passport was suspended by the Australian government after the ASIO raids, preventing him from travelling to The Hague.

His passport has not been reissued.

East Timor argues the eavesdropping on its government offices rendered the CMATS treaty void because it means it was not negotiated in "good faith" as required.

A boundary equidistant between East Timor and Australia would place more of the reserves within the territory of the half-island nation of 1 million people.

But there are differing views on what would happen with the massive Greater Sunrise reserves under such a boundary change. The \$40 billion project has yet to be developed because of the boundary dispute.

The Australian government, and some observers, say the lateral boundaries that divide the Timor Sea are key to which country can claim ownership over Greater Sunrise, and note that those boundaries are shared with Indonesia.

A spokeswoman for Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop said it was hoped the two countries would resolve their differences amicably, noting that East Timor got 50 per cent of the Greater Sunrise

revenues.

Tom Clarke, of the Timor Sea Justice Campaign, raised concerns about the dropping of the ICJ case as an apparent act of "good will".

"It's important to keep in mind that Australia has never done anything to demonstrate its willingness to negotiate in good faith," Mr Clarke said.

"Time isn't on East Timor's side and the Australian government knows this. It has been willing to stonewall Timor's requests for negotiations again and again, and it is more than happy to make things drag on and on. To starve Timor out."

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/east-timor-reactivates-bid-for-new-maritime-boundary-with-australia-20150603-ghjrf0.html>*