

## breaking news

# Aust ignoring border dispute: Timor MPs

● MARCH 3, 2016 6:07PM

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Australia took advantage of East Timor's weakness and is now dodging its international obligations over the disputed marine border, a Timorese MP says.

During a special session of parliament in Dili on Thursday, the heads of all four major political parties entreated Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove to ask the Australian government to come to the negotiating table over the disputed marine border between the countries.

Since 2002 there has been uncertainty over the exact parameters of the border because Australia is ignoring the issue, said Natalino dos Santos Nascimento, of the CNRT party.

"The Australian government did everything to prevent an agreement for the sea and made sure we had no other choice than to accept their proposal," he said via an interpreter.

"That was a very difficult choice for us because we were a very weak country; we had no assistance from experts on oil issues, no legal expertise to analyse the process of this agreement ... The Australian government knew and took advantage of our weaknesses."

Aniceto Guterres from Fretilin said Australia's unwillingness to renegotiate showed its position on the border is weak.

"We just ask our neighbour Australia to respect our rights according to international law," he said.

"We hope with our beautiful friendship we won't just be speaking words into the wind, we hope that people will hear us."

The Governor-General said Australia wanted to focus on close ties in the future.

"It's not always easy, it's not always simple... Like all friends, we have our differences," he said.

Since signing the 2006 treaty, East Timor "has accrued significant sovereign wealth in your petroleum fund" which would provide for future generations, he said.

"Australia is known as a fair and pragmatic country, we will continue to seek fair and pragmatic solutions to resolve our differences ... Our people stand together."

#### THE MARINE BORDER DISPUTE:

- \* Timor-Leste and Australia signed treaties in 2002 and 2006 as provisional arrangements regarding the marine border, across which sit the Greater Sunrise underwater oil and gas fields
- \* Australia originally received more than 80% of revenues which has been revised to a more equitable split
- \* East Timor wants to negotiate a formal marine border with a median line split, but Australia has so far not agreed to enter into formal talks
- \* East Timor is the only country with which Australia is yet to negotiate a marine border
- \* The lucrative refining of the oil and gas is done in Australia
- \* In 2013 East Timor took Australia to the international court, alleging that Australian spies bugged its cabinet room to eavesdrop on deliberations about Greater Sunrise
- \* It says that since independence it has lost about \$US5 billion in royalties and tax revenue due to the border division, equivalent to about three years of the national budget.