



East Timor-Australia maritime border to be negotiated before United Nations after protests

By Political Reporter Matthew Doran

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East Timor is taking Australia to the United Nations to solve the dispute over its maritime border under international maritime law.

The island nation has long argued current arrangements mean it is missing out on billions of dollars in revenue from offshore oil and gas fields.

Last month, thousands of protesters gathered outside the Australian embassy in Dili calling for Australia to negotiate.

In a statement, the East Timorese Government said while there were temporary resource-sharing arrangements in the Timor Sea, there was no permanent maritime boundary between Australia and the small island nation.

It has now approached the UN to begin a formal conciliation process conducted by an independent panel of experts.

Australia has withdrawn from the maritime boundary jurisdiction of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

East Timor believed if the maritime boundary was decided under UNCLOS, most of the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea would lie within their territory.

The location of the maritime border in relation to a multi-billion-dollar oil and gas field in the Timor Sea is central to a spying scandal that has rocked relations between East Timor and Australia.

Australia has been accused of bugging East Timor's cabinet office during negotiations for a treaty that would divide the revenues from the \$40 billion Greater Sunrise oil and gas field.

That treaty ruled revenue from the Greater Sunrise field would be split evenly between the two countries.

"Establishing permanent maritime boundaries is a matter of national priority for Timor-Leste, as the final step in realising our sovereignty as an independent state," Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo said.

"Under international law, Australia is obliged to negotiate permanent maritime boundaries with Timor-Leste but it has refused to do so, despite all our invitations.

"This has left us with only one option.

"This process allows for a commission to assist our two countries to reach an amicable solution on permanent maritime boundaries."

Dr Araujo said his country is seeking a fair and equitable solution to what it argues it is entitled to under international law.

Topics: trade, government-and-politics, oil-and-gas, industry, business-economics-and-finance, east-timor, asia, australia



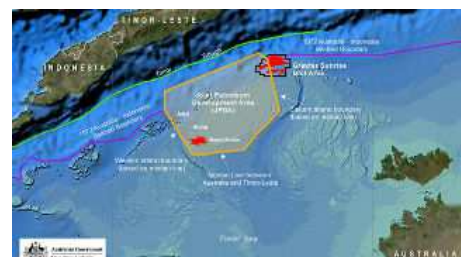
PHOTO: Timor-Leste Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo says Australia rejected invitations to negotiate. (Reuters: Lirio Da Fonseca)

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MAP: East Timor

A history of treaties in the Timor Sea



- In 1989 Australia and Indonesia signed the Timor Gap Treaty when East Timor was still under Indonesian occupation.
- East Timor was left with no permanent maritime border and Indonesia and Australia got to share the wealth in what was known as the Timor Gap.
- In 2002 East Timor gained independence and the Timor Sea Treaty was signed, but no permanent maritime border was negotiated.
- East Timor has long argued the border should sit halfway between it and Australia, placing most of the Greater Sunrise oil and gas field in their territory.
- In 2004 East Timor started negotiating with Australia again about the border.
- In 2006 the CMATS treaty was signed, but no permanent border was set, and instead it ruled that revenue from the Greater Sunrise oil and gas field would be split evenly between the two countries.