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Labor to reopen talks with East Timor

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Labor has pledged to reopen good-faith negotiations with East Timor over a disputed maritime boundary and oil and gas reserves if it wins government.

Opposition foreign affairs spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek flagged the move while outlining her foreign policy vision in a keynote speech on Wednesday.

"For Labor, being a good international citizen is much more than window-dressing," she told the National Press Club in Canberra.

"The maritime boundary dispute has poisoned relations with our newest neighbour."

East Timor for years has sought to renegotiate a treaty governing sharing arrangements for revenue from the Greater Sunrise oil and gas field worth an estimated \$40 billion.

The treaty was signed soon after East Timor gained statehood in 2002.

There have been allegations Australia eavesdropped on East Timor officials during negotiations.

Ms Plibersek noted that East Timor had suffered decades of war and starvation before gaining independence and Australia played a key role in helping to secure its statehood.

A change of tack was in the national interests of both countries.

If new negotiations weren't successful, a Labor government would be prepared to submit to international adjudication or arbitration.

Ms Plibersek pointed to Japan's decision to resume whaling and ignore the ruling of the International Court of Justice.

"If we want to insist that other nations play by the rules, we also need to adhere to them," she said.

"We have a good record in doing so, but not a flawless one."

This week it was revealed Australia has spent \$1 million fighting litigation brought by East Timor over an ASIO raid linked to a dispute over the oil and gas reserves.

The December 2013 raid on the offices of Bernard Collaery, the Australian lawyer

acting for East Timor, in which documents and electronic data were seized was authorised by Attorney-General George Brandis.

The International Court of Justice, in a decision announced in March 2014, ordered Australia to cease spying on East Timor and to seal any documents and data seized in the ASIO raid.

Asked if Labor would commit to the median line principle for the maritime boundary Ms Plibersek responded: "I'm not going to determine a border from the podium at the National Press Club.

"That is the purpose of negotiations."

The Timor Sea Justice Campaign welcomed the Labor pledge.

"For too long Australia has been ripping off East Timor through dodgy oil and gas treaties," spokesman Tom Clarke said.

"Permanent and fair maritime boundaries set in keeping with current international law would put this dispute to rest for good."