

TIMOR SEA JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

Tanya Plibersek outlines ALP's new policy to establish permanent maritime boundaries with East Timor

Today during a National Press Club Address, the Shadow Foreign Minister, Tanya Plibersek, outlined the Australian Labor Party's recently amended policy position regarding the Timor Sea dispute.

The Timor Sea Justice Campaign's spokesperson in Melbourne, Tom Clarke, welcomed the Labor Party's commitment to enter fresh negotiations with East Timor to establish permanent maritime boundaries and the commitment to take the dispute to independent arbitration if necessary.

"The Labor party has been all of the shop when it comes to our relationship with East Timor, so it's very positive to see Tanya Plibersek providing leadership on this issue. For too long Australia has been ripping off East Timor through dodgy oil and gas treaties, so Ms Plibersek is absolutely right when she says it's time to draw the line and establish fair and permanent maritime boundaries once and for all," said Mr Clarke.

Ms Plibersek encouraged all nations to sign and abide by the UN's Convention on the Law of the Sea and said a Labor Government would resubmit to the maritime boundary jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice – which Australia withdrew from in 2002 just two month's before East Timor's independence.

"Resubmitting to the ICJ would be a very good move because it's currently very hard to take any of the Australian Government's claims and legal arguments seriously when it has turned its back on the independent umpire," said Mr Clarke.

East Timor has never had permanent maritime boundaries. It has repeatedly asked the Australian Government to agree to permanent maritime boundaries based on current international law, but instead Australia has jostled the fledgling nation into a series of temporary resource sharing agreements.

"Permanent and fair maritime boundaries set in keeping with current international law would put this dispute to rest for good. It would help East Timor stand on its own two feet and it would help to repair Australia's reputation in the region," said Mr Clarke.

Although Ms Plibersek stopped short of committing to maritime boundaries based on the median line, Mr Clarke said committing to follow current international law was more or less the same thing as the overwhelming consensus is that international law strongly favours maritime boundaries based on the median line principle in such circumstance when two coastlines are less than 400 nautical miles apart.

"To put it simply, a median line solution means drawing a line halfway between the two coast lines. So if an oil field was closer to East Timor then it would belong to Timor and if it was closer to Australia then it would be ours. So it's the fair and common sense approach and it's what international law prescribes," said Mr Clarke.

For further comments: Tom Clarke can be reached on 0422 545 763

A fair go for East Timor.

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