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Australia can't give advice on territorial matters while still in dispute with East Timor: Bracks

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Former Victorian Premier Steve Bracks said Australia needs to tidy up its own relationship with East Timor before giving advice to other nations on territorial disputes.

Claire Bickers, News Corp Australia Network

AUSTRALIA can't lecture anyone on a solution for the South China Sea until it sorts out its own long-running sea border dispute with East Timor where \$40 billion in oil and gas resources is in play.

That's according to former Victorian Premier Steve Bracks, who says Australia will be "morally obliged" to accept a solution if the Permanent Court of Arbitration rules in favour of East Timor in a dispute over where a sea border between the two countries should lie.

Mr Bracks' comments come as [a new documentary](#) outlining the long running dispute between the two nations screens around Australia over the next three months.

Time to Draw the Line outlines Australia and East Timor's long relationship from WWII to more recent allegations of spying by Australian intelligence operatives.



East Timorese activists at a rally outside the Australian embassy in Dili almost a year ago on the delicate topic of the maritime border which cuts through lucrative oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea. Picture: AFP/Valentino Dariel Sousa Source:AFP

The documentary is highly critical of Australia's bid to gain an equal share of the energy wealth of the Joint Petroleum Development Area by refusing to agree to a border.

Mr Bracks, who has been a pro-bono adviser to East Timor, also known as Timor-Leste, for nearly a decade, told News Corp this week the dispute had the potential to sour relationships between the two countries despite their long, close relationship.

Australia was insisting on boundaries in the South China Sea but was really "holding it over" East Timor in its own backyard, a country which needed the royalties from the Greater Sunrise fields to develop, he said.

Australia has negotiated 98.2 per cent of the sea borders it shares with other nations, except for the 1.8 per cent it shares with East Timor.

"The most surprising thing is that Australia has argued the case that they will get 50 per cent of the resources, even though it's 150km from Timor and 400km from Australia," Mr Bracks said.

"They have argued on the basis that the mid point should count from the end of the continental shelf.



The dispute goes way back, however. Here protesters outside the US Chamber of Commerce in 2005 voice their concerns over Australia's treatment of East Timor in regard to its oil. Source: *News Corp Australia*

“That argument is not sustainable anywhere in the world.”

Australia’s announcement in January that it would negotiate a permanent border over the next 12 months was “good news”, Mr Bracks said

The two nations have also agreed to tear up a 2006 treaty on the Greater Sunrise reserve in the Timor Sea.

The treaty split future revenue of Greater Sunrise reserve equally between East Timor and Australia and put a 50-year moratorium on a permanent maritime boundary.

It comes after an ASIS whistleblower claimed in 2012 that Australian intelligence operatives had bugged the East Timor Government’s cabinet rooms in 2004, which gave Australia the advantage in negotiations which led to the treaty.

Mr Bracks believes the case for East Timor to secure the midway border which would give it sole benefits of royalties from the Greater Sunrise fields is “very strong”.

He said the documentary, funded largely by the East Timor Government, would enhance public support in Australia for the midway border.