

Timor Sea Treaty
Submission No: 73

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BY:

27 Duchess Ave
Rodd Point
NSW 2046
3-9-'02

The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Chair of Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Dear Ms Bishop,

I am writing to you to express my concern that the Government ensures, in the ratification of the Timor Sea Treaty, that it is a fair & equitable settlement that recognizes East Timor's development needs.

It seems that we have already been quite obstructive in the negotiations towards the resolution of the dispute over the legal maritime boundaries between Australia & East Timor. I believe the preferred method for states & the International Court of Justice, since the 1980s has been the lines of equidistance. No doubt if it was to our advantage we would be arguing for that method to be used in this case. However, as the Greater Sunrise gas field would in that case largely belong to East Timor we insist on using the continental shelf!!

As we have only just overcome the negative perception of East Timorese people towards the Australian Government & are now proudly proclaiming how much we have helped in the creation of this new nation, it would seem counterproductive to deny them a fair deal in a project that will give them the economic means to become self sufficient.

The failure to unlock the resources of the Timor Sea for the full benefit of the East Timorese people may have significant long term consequences for the human development & stability of East Timor as well. Revenues from oil & natural gas offer the greatest opportunities for meeting the basic needs of the people. Whereas Australia is already well endowed with natural resources & economic stability. In light of our own wealth of natural resources & our long term experience in exploiting them, we also have a responsibility to "prioritise training & employment opportunities for East Timorese nationals & residents" as stated in Article 11 of the Treaty.

Surely as a new nation East Timor has the right to establish their boundaries & create for themselves their own space in the world. To enable this to happen Australia needs to establish a fair & reasonably short timeframe, not exceeding 5 years, for the settling of the boundary dispute. Our withdrawal from the dispute settlement mechanisms of the IJC & UNCLOS seems to be an over-reaction & severely limits East Timor's options in seeking an objective third party resolution.

I urge you in your role as Chair of the Standing Committee on Treaties to ensure that the ratification of the Treaty is accompanied by public commitments to the measures I have outlined above.

Yours sincerely,
Barbara Symons

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON TREATIES

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