

Joint Parliamentary Inquiry (Australia) into the consequences of terminating CMATs treaty

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This is a submission from a not-for-profit organisation providing housing loans in Timor Leste.

Now that both Australia and East Timor have agreed to remove Article 2(4) from the CMATs treaty which meant in effect that a maritime boundary could not be settled for another 50 years, it is possible to consider the consequences of settling the issue of a maritime boundary itself.

1. Timor Leste is one of the poorest countries in the world, progressing from a condition post-1999 comparable to the current pictures coming out of Syria (and I saw this myself in 2000). On our repeated visits to Timor Leste, it has been encouraging to see their recovery. However this has always been under the cloud of an unresolved maritime boundary issue. The uncertainty has generated great resentment in Timor Leste because their economic independence is at stake and does not auger well for future relations. Can we afford to have a seriously disaffected country right on our northern border? There are other international players keen to replace the influence of Australia and their presence is obvious if you visit Dili. When your country still has high levels of malnutrition and other health problems, poor roads and infrastructure, and limited resources to sell on the international market, any country willing to help will get preference. The consequence of Australia not settling the maritime boundary fairly is reprehensibly short-sighted in regards to **Australia's national security**.

2. International maritime boundaries are established on a median line for a reason, to stop bigger countries like Australia from exploiting their greater power for their own purposes and, to be more accurate, for the purposes of multinational oil and gas companies who wield influence over the policies of Australian political parties. Royalty payments going to Australia and associated companies yield billions of dollars that, according to international maritime law, should go to Timor Leste with a normal fair border. It is utter hypocrisy to lecture other countries about ignoring international law in the South China Sea and do the same ourselves. This has **damaged Australia's reputation** and standing in the world greatly.

3. From my contacts with our Australian supporters I know there is widespread unease about the double standards of Australia and both major political parties in dealing with Timor Leste over the long period since the deal with Indonesia to divide up Timor's natural resources. It leaves a bad taste in our national mouth (and nothing in mouths of the Timorese). National advocacy of and implementation of **just outcomes**, ie a fair median maritime boundary with Timor Leste, **are what voters want**, not government promotion of greed and exploitation. People support a not for-profit organisation like ours because they care about people more disadvantaged than them and because they understand that the more inequality there is in the world, the worse the world becomes. Maritime boundary settlement in a fair and equitable way is what voters desire.