

End of Timor Sea agreement

Saturday 18 March 2017 7:30AM

Timor Leste has pulled out of the treaty arrangement with Australia that guides what can happen to the Greater Sunrise gas reserves in the Timor Sea, majority owned and operated by Woodside.

The treaty is called CMATS: Certain Maritime Arrangements in Timor Sea Agreement.

Australian experts were summonsed to Parliament House this week to appear before the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, to discuss the ramifications.



IMAGE: EAST TIMORESE BOYS IN THE TIMOR SEA OFF THE COAST OF DILI ((PHOTO BY PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES))

Guests

Rebecca Strating

Lecturer in Politics, La Trobe University.

Credits

PresenterGeraldine Doogue

ProducerAnn Arnold

Comments (3)

Sue mears :

18 Mar 2017 8:52:42am

Re Timor Leste

Withdrawal from the treaty is probably a part of the effort to force a FAIR and permanent maritime boundary between Timor-Leste and Australia. Australia's appalling claim, first, that UNCLOS has no jurisdiction to hear that case, and since, that the expected sept 2017 decision will be "non-binding" is a shame on all of us.

Ian Belmont :

19 Mar 2017 11:30:01am

Australia's treatment of Timor Leste over the Greater Sunrise gas reserves seems a continuation its big brother (I known what's best for you because we helped you in 1999) attitude to his 2nd/3rd closest neighbour. With Australia bugging the Timor Leste government during treaty talks and our foreign minster taking advice from the oil companies who want the extract the gas, Timor Leste wanting to get some long term development from the gas field is/was taking a very poor last in what was going to happen.

Rebecca Strating's condescending references about money issues with Timor Leste further budgets gives no credit to what the Timorese want to do.

We seem to forget that our own Treasurer whats to raid the Further Fund against the advise of many others for that short term gain to his bottom line, instead of letting the power of compound interest kick in to make this fund work to the long term needs of why it was started.

Susan Connelly :

19 Mar 2017 5:04:33pm

No where in the discussion was there mention of the reasons for Timor-Leste taking up the CMATS Treaty's provisions for termination, other than the non-exploitation of the resources within 6 years of signing. Omission of the alleged Australian spying on the Timorese negotiations before the signing of CMATS is unfortunate, as this was the catalyst. The discussion this morning completely exonerated Australia through this omission, insinuating that the whole termination procedure was the responsibility of Timor-Leste.

The Timorese have dropped the espionage case as part of the effort to bring the sovereignty issue to a close, but as an Australian, I haven't dropped it. It is an utter disgrace.

Again, in the short discussion of the 2002 signing of the Timor Sea Treaty, there was no mention of the Australian withdrawal from the two international bodies which oversaw maritime boundary discussions, an act which Australia accomplished just two months before Timorese independence. This act suggests that Australia knew full well that the arrangements would not have withstood international scrutiny. The result was that a small nation just emerging from illegal occupation was forced into dealing with the sophisticated legal machinery of Australia. That resembles bullying to me.

Furthermore, Australia has benefitted to the tune of 2 billion dollars from a now depleted area on the western side of the JPDA, Laminaria-Corallina, which is 1 billion dollars more than we have spent on aid in Timor. We got all the tax revenue and Timor got none. In effect, Timor is the one who has given us aid.

Nowhere in the discussion was there mention that the termination of the CMATS Treaty is a necessary step towards Timor-Leste securing the final part of its sovereignty, its border with Australia. The final comments alluded to that in passing, but in a way which suggested that the resources should be determined first, then for the parties to look into sovereignty. The only way to determine who owns what is to decide on sovereignty, surely. Anyone who has installed a backyard fence knows that. If the maritime boundary was set in accordance with international law, then Timor would have 100% of the Greater Sunrise area, not the 50% which Australia was claiming.

The comments about Australia having a "fragile state" next to us should the Timorese go ahead and claim their sovereignty rankles very much with Australians who understand the deceit and greed displayed by Australia regarding East Timor over decades. Rather than engaging in "what if", more benefit may be found in investigating the level of Australia scholarships offered to the Timorese, and calculating the benefits of a major increase in that level.

I can just image the hoo-haa if any nation tried to do to Australia what we are doing to Timor-Leste.

Anyway, as an Australian, I think the government has to duty to finalise ou