

U.S. Congress supports Timor-Leste's right to a fair maritime boundary with Australia



August 1, 2017 - The East Timor and Indonesia *Action Network* (ETAN) lauded the U.S. House of Representatives for urging a fair resolution to the maritime boundary dispute between Australia and Timor-Leste.

In July, the House noted that a fair and peaceful resolution to the dispute would set a positive example for the resolution of other maritime disputes in the region. (see [text below](#))

The House directed the Secretary of Defense with the Secretary of State to brief the House Committee on Armed Services "on the potential security benefits that may result from the Australia-Timor-Leste conciliation process and how a peaceful resolution to the dispute might affect overall U.S. defense and security interests in the region."

Australia is now on notice that its key ally wants a fair conclusion to the talks on the maritime boundary.

"We believe that a permanent boundary is Timor-Leste's sovereign right and that the boundary should respect current practice under international law," said John M. Miller, National Coordinator of ETAN.

"We welcome the U.S. House of Representatives attention to this important issue. Australia is now on notice that its key ally wants a fair conclusion to the talks on the maritime boundary," Miller added.

Timor-Leste and Australia are [currently participating](#) in "[conciliation](#)," a form of non-binding mediation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

For the last quarter century ETAN has urged the U.S. and Australian governments, the United Nations and others to respect the sovereign rights of the East Timorese people to define the terrestrial and maritime limits of their territory.

The language concerning the maritime boundary dispute was included in the report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 (H.R. 2810), an annual policy-setting bill. The full bill passed the House on July 14, 2017. The statement about Timor-Leste was introduced by Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-Guam), the Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness.

From <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-115hrpt200/pdf/CRPT-115hrpt200.pdf>

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

115TH CONGRESS 1st Session REPORT 115-200

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018 REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON H.R. 2810 together with ADDITIONAL VIEWS [Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

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Timor Sea Maritime Developments

The committee recognizes the strategic importance of the Indo-Asia-Pacific region and has a strong interest in ensuring processes to resolve territorial and maritime disputes are done fairly and peacefully in accordance with international law. Given the growing and complex regional maritime security issues in the Pacific, the committee believes that negotiations between Australia and Timor-Leste to establish permanent maritime boundaries sends a positive signal to other states in the region regarding adherence to a rules-based international order. A mutually agreed upon resolution could serve as an example for resolving other disputes peacefully and have benefits to cooperative maritime efforts in the region. The committee directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide a briefing to the House Committee on Armed Services, not later than September 30, 2017, on the potential security benefits that may result from the Australia-Timor Leste conciliation process and how a peaceful resolution to the dispute might affect overall U.S. defense and security interests in the region.