

## **Australia agrees to sign new maritime border treaty with Timor-Leste**

Dili, 16 Dec 2017 (Lusa) The Australian government agreed this week to sign the treaty on maritime borders with Timor-Leste, a document whose contents have been finalized and will be signed in the presence of the UN Secretary-General, sources close to the process told Lusa.

“Australia has agreed to sign the treaty, and the timetable will now be agreed with the UN Secretary-General to define exactly when it will be signed,” said the source, who highlighted the progress made in the talks this week.

The sources explained that this was the most positive news coming out of the negotiating round held in Singapore last week by delegations from Timor-Leste and Australia under the auspices of a UN Conciliation Commission.

Also present this week in Singapore, confirmed the sources, were representatives of the oil companies that are part of the Joint Venture that controls the important Greater Sunrise field.

“It was the fifth time that representatives of Joint Venture participated in the negotiating rounds,” the source explained to Lusa, who said that there were separate meetings of the Conciliation Commission with the oil companies and informal meetings of the delegations.

The treaty is one of the central elements of the agreement negotiated over the past year, which, moreover, indicates that the “core elements” of the delimitation of maritime borders between the two countries - centered, it seems, on the median line always claimed by Timor-Leste - the development of the Greater Sunrise gas field in the Timor Sea.

The only pending issue has to do with how the gas will be exploited: whether with a pipeline to Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia, or to move it to the south coast of Timor-Leste. The fate of this pipeline will determine how revenues will be divided between the two countries.

Lusa's sources explained that the commission asked the two parties for “detailed information” on the options they defend in order to advance and conclude this more “bumpy” aspect of the dialogue.

In this sense, and to reinforce the information, the main negotiator of the Timorese delegation, Xanana Gusmão, travels this weekend to Papua New Guinea where he will learn about the country's natural gas project.

Absent from Timor-Leste since September 11, Xanana Gusmão has been leading negotiations with Australia on this issue, crucial for the future of Timor-Leste and deserving a national consensus among Timorese.

It is recalled that the meetings take place in the framework of the conciliation procedure between Timor-Leste and Australia conducted by a Conciliation Commission under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and under the auspices of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague.

The Committee is moving forward in the preparation of its report on the negotiating process, which will be finalized and published early in 2018.

It is recalled that the conciliation commission, established on June 25, 2016, was initiated on April 11, 2016, by Timor-Leste sending a “Notification of Institution of Conciliation, pursuant to Section 2 of Annex V of the Convention” to Australia.

The commission is composed of five members, two chosen by each of the countries and chaired by Ambassador Peter Taksøe-Jensen.

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