

Mari Alkatiri wants signing of boundary agreement with Australia in March

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Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri was confident today that it is still possible to sign the maritime boundary agreement with Australia in March, and negotiations on the Greater Sunrise field are continuing.

Speaking to reporters, the head of the management government explained that the agreement should be signed by Xanana Gusmão, Timor-Leste's current main negotiator in the dialogue with Australia mediated by a UN Conciliation Commission.

"In principle, I think it will be possible to sign in March. But my brother Xanana has to return to take office, to discuss his status and to be able to sign on behalf of the state," he explained.

"I do not want to force anyone to say it has to be this or that," he said, recalling that he continues to defend that the Timorese historic leader should lead a new High Authority for the development of the south coast, a project directly associated with the petroleum sector and the Greater Sunrise project.

Mari Alkatiri spoke to journalists after the weekly meeting with the President of the Republic at the Presidential Palace, where he reported on the work of the government, which is currently under management [English translation unclear – meaning that new elections have been called].

It is recalled that the President of the Republic announced last week the dissolution of the National Parliament, as a solution to the political impasse in Timor-Leste, and will soon announce the date of the early elections.

Xanana Gusmão and the Timorese team are in Sydney this week for talks with the Australian Government on the one hand, but also with the oil consortium that has the Greater Sunrise concession: Woodside, ConocoPhillips, Royal Dutch Shell and Osaka Gas.

Although the issue of boundary definition itself is virtually resolved with Australia, sources close to the process concede that negotiations about Greater Sunrise may be "more prolonged."

In its last communiqué, in December, the Conciliation Commission explained that the two Governments had agreed "that they will proceed with signing in early March 2018."

The same note anticipated that a decision on the development concept for the Greater Sunrise field "will be reached by March 1, 2018," according to sources familiar with the negotiation process whom Lusa could not reach.

Xanana Gusmão and the Timorese delegation have been multiplying in recent months to try to demonstrate that Timor-Leste's choice of a pipeline from the Greater Sunrise fields to the south coast of the country is technically feasible and financially possible.

The consortium that leads the project advocates linking the project to Darwin.

In general terms, the more comprehensive draft treaty delimits the maritime border between Timor-Leste and Australia in the Timor Sea and establishes a Special Regime for the area that includes the Greater Sunrise gas field.

The draft treaty also establishes revenue sharing arrangements through which portions of the upstream revenue allocated to each Party will differ depending on the expected economic benefits from the different concepts of development for the Greater Sunrise gas field, according to the commission.

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