

Christopher Knaus in the Guardian daily news summary

Timorese advocates call for pardon of Witness K after Australia's decision not to prosecute Bernard Collaery

Civil society groups in **Timor-Leste** have welcomed the Australian government's **decision to drop its pursuit of Bernard Collaery**, but have warned the "overdue decision cannot undo the shameful history of Australia's bugging TimorLeste's government palace in 2004".

The attorney general, **Mark Dreyfus**, announced on Thursday he had directed commonwealth prosecutors to no-bill the prosecution of Collaery, an intervention thought to be unprecedented in Australian legal history.

The decision prompted widespread relief and praise in Australia, including from Collaery's supporters, leaders in Timor-Leste, and human rights advocates and lawyers.

La'o Hamutuk, or the **Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis**, issued a statement on Wednesday morning welcoming the decision. But it said much more was needed to rebuild the damaged relationship between the two countries, including the issuing of a **pardon for Witness K**.

To rebuild good neighbourly relations between Australia and TimorLeste, the Australian government should recognise that it has blatantly violated Timor-Leste's sovereignty, and return to policies of mutual respect between the two nations. Healthy diplomacy needs to address past transgressions, and Australia should return more than \$5 billion it took in from oil and gas fields that it now agrees are in Timor-Leste's territory.

We also think that mutual respect as neighbours means supporting each other as partners, not taking advantage of Timor-Leste's weaker economy, less experienced administration, and limited human resources to obtain benefits for Australia at the expense of Timor-Leste's people. This should be reflected by cancelling some future projects, including the planned Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) at Bayu-Undan which would exploit Timor-Leste's vulnerability to enable the carbon-intensive Barossa project in Australia, further damaging the global and local climate.

In addition, we suggest that Australia should pardon "Witness K", who was pressured into pleading guilty to a crime he did not commit. "Witness K" used proper channels to report an inappropriate action he was ordered to carry out, and should be unconditionally exonerated. Both he and Bernard Collaery have been good and honourable friends to Timor-Leste, and Australia should compensate them for the harm that unjust prosecution has already inflicted on them.

Collaery, a lawyer, and Witness K, an intelligence officer, were prosecuted for their efforts to expose a 2004 bugging operation mounted against Timor-Leste, an impoverished ally of Australia, during talks to carve up oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea.