

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2005

The Honorable John Howard  
Office of the Australian Prime Minister  
3-5 National Circuit  
Barton, ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

As members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives who have long supported independence and development for the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, we would like to share our concerns regarding the upcoming negotiations between your country and Timor-Leste on economic and territorial rights in the Timor Sea.

We urge Australia to move quickly and seriously to establish a fair, permanent maritime boundary with Timor-Leste, based on the rule of law and respect for the sovereignty of both nations. Until such a settlement is reached, we would urge that any revenue from disputed areas on Timor-Leste's side of the median line but outside the Joint Petroleum Development Area be held in escrow. We hope that the temporary suspension of the development of the Greater Sunrise field, which has eased pressure from oil companies for a quick fix, will serve as a catalyst for a more thorough, deliberate and empathetic resolution of the territorial dispute.

Although Timor-Leste has been free of Indonesian military occupation since 1999, its citizens continue to struggle against illiteracy, poverty, preventable disease and a lack of basic services. We are especially concerned by reports of scores of recent preventable deaths in Timor-Leste that have resulted from chronic food shortages and outbreaks of dengue hemorrhagic fever. An equitable sharing of oil and gas revenues would enable Timor-Leste to provide better health care and other essential services to its citizens. Such equitable sharing of revenue is not a question of charity; rather it is a matter of self-determination, sovereignty and Timor-Leste's future.

We applaud the fact that Australia has helped Timor-Leste achieve independence and also provided significant humanitarian and reconstruction aid. However, the approximately two billion Australian dollars your government has received in revenues since 1999 from Laminaria-Corallina fields located twice as close to Timor-Leste, is much larger than the total cost of your generous assistance. We are aware that many East Timorese believe these fields and the revenue generated -- equivalent to about four years of Timor Leste's GDP or one day of Australia's -- as well as most or all of Greater Sunrise should belong to Timor-Leste. We urge your government to participate in international legal mechanisms for arbitration of maritime boundary disputes, which should include the issue of control of resource development outside the interim Joint Petroleum Development Area.

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We admire your country's leadership in 1999 in helping to free the people of Timor-Leste from the political oppression under which they suffered for so long. We hope these maritime boundary negotiations will move fairly and expeditiously, and that your country will once again play a leading role in helping the people of Timor-Leste to be free, this time from the oppression of poverty that is preventing them from progressing as one of the world's newest democracies.

Thank you for your consideration.

With best regards,

  
SENATOR JACK REED

  
SENATOR JAMES M. JEFFORDS

  
SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

  
SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY

  
SENATOR TOM HARKIN

  
SENATOR RON WIDEN

  
REP. NANCY PELOSI

  
REP. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

  
REP. TOM LANTOS

  
REP. BARNEY FRANK

  
REP. NITA M. LOWEY

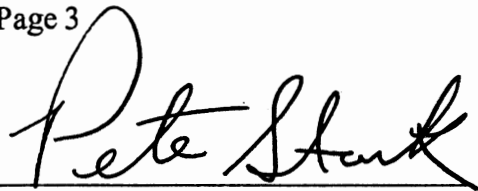
  
REP. ENI F. H. FALEOMAVAEGA

  
REP. JAMES P. MCGOVERN

  
REP. PATRICK J. KENNEDY

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pete Stark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

REP. FORTNEY PETE STARK

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lane Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "L".

REP. LANE EVANS

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim McDermott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

REP. JIM McDERMOTT