



## Shire urged to back East Timor's gas field claims

September 14, 2015 [David Harrison](#)

MORNINGTON Peninsula Shire councillors are being urged to pressure the federal government into giving East Timor the chance to earn billions of dollars from undersea gas fields.

"It is disgusting for a wealthy advanced country like Australia to literally steal part of a rich gas field from one of the poorest, least developed and needy nations on earth, Cr Tim Rodgers said.

On Monday Cr Rodgers was set to tell council colleagues that it was time Australia entered into a more equitable agreement so that East Timor (Timor-Leste) received a greater share of profits from the rich offshore gas fields.

"We are calling on the Australian government to immediately start negotiations on setting fair permanent maritime boundaries with Timor-Leste and to re-submit to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea," he said.

The shire has a friendship relationship with the Timor-Leste district of Lospalos.

The gas field issue has festered for years, with the Australian government having effectively repudiated international rules dealing with seabed boundaries some 13 years ago. It has since refused to negotiate permanent boundaries.

A scandal erupted in 2013 when Timor-Leste accused Australia of having planted listening devices in its cabinet office to eavesdrop on confidential Timor Sea Treaty discussions.

It launched a case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague to pull out of a gas treaty it had signed with Australia.

In March 2014, the International Court of Justice ordered Australia to stop the spying.

A report to councillors at Monday night's meeting said: "If these [seabed] boundaries were set in accordance with International Law, the significant fields of gas located outside the treaty zone of co-operation would belong to Timor-Leste as part of its exclusive economic zone.

"If so, one such field – the Greater Sunrise Field – located just 150 kilometres from Timor's shore, may generate some \$40 billion for Timor-Leste.

"Yet another such field – Laminaria Corallina – has yielded \$2 billion in taxes and royalties for Australia since 1999, all of which would flow to Timor-Leste if the maritime boundaries were set in accordance with International Law."

Cr Rodgers, a strong supporter of Timor-Leste and sponsor of the motion put to council, said: "All this poor, struggling nation's problems of health, education and infrastructure would be solved" were Australia to cede it a fair share of the hydrocarbon wealth locked in the fields.

The report to council backs this: "Even a minor adjustment of these maritime boundaries in accordance with International Law would shift billions of dollars of potential revenue from Australia to Timor-Leste.

"Yet Australia refuses to negotiate a permanent maritime boundary with Timor-Leste placing in jeopardy its legacy in, and friendship with, Timor-Leste."

Cr Rodgers said 22 of Victoria's 79 councils – nearly 30 per cent – had friendship relationships with Timor-Leste.

He said the nation's "excellent coffee" can be bought from any shire office, he said, and Timor-Leste arts and craft were often on sale through the shire.

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