

PM rules out East Timor gas compensation

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Australia will not compensate East Timor for an alleged \$5 billion in gas revenue it collected during a previous treaty signed after it spied on the country by bugging its offices.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday signed a new maritime boundary treaty in Dili giving East Timor a far greater share of gas royalties.

The announcement came on the 20th anniversary of East Timor's vote for independence from Indonesia, which was marked by widespread violence driven by Indonesia.

When asked by the East Timorese media, Mr Morrison said the new deal would not include past revenue.

That was despite Australia being forced to renegotiate when it was exposed in 2012 as having bugged East Timor cabinet meetings in 2004.

"The agreement that was worked through over quite a period of time was that those revenue sharing arrangements commence from the time of the exchange, that's what we agreed to and that's what we'll do," he told reporters.

Mr Morrison on Friday put aside the years of acrimony over the gas - and the spying scandal - to sign a maritime boundary treaty under which revenue from the rich Greater Sunrise oil and gas fields will be split.

"There's a lot more our two countries can do together. I look forward to working with Timor-Leste to develop the Greater Sunrise fields in the Timor Sea for the benefit of both countries."

Australia played a major role in leading the peacekeeping force that combatted violence at the 1999 vote - and as a donor and investor in East Timor.

However, Mr Morrison is the first Australian prime minister to visit East Timor in nearly 12 years.

Both Mr Morrison and East Timor prime minister Taur Matan Ruak said little on the spy scandal and whether the controversial criminal prosecution of Witness K, the spy who revealed the bugging, and his lawyer Bernard Collaery should occur.

The new treaty became essential after the whistleblowers exposed the bugging scandal.

"That's a domestic matter in Australia that's currently before the courts and not a matter I intend to comment on," Mr Morrison said.

Mr Ruak said Friday was a day to celebrate the new deal.

"I am sure the Minister of Justice in Australia will look into issues and the Ministry of Justice in Timor Leste will look into the issues," he said.

Shirley Shackleton, the widow of journalist Greg Shackleton who was murdered in East Timor in 1975 by Indonesian forces, had tried to confront Mr Morrison about it when he arrived to meet Mr Ruak.

She did not reach him, but did speak to Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne and gave her a petition of 4000 signatures calling for criminal charges to be dropped.

"I am not a lawyer but I know what is right and wrong and this is wrong. It should not happen in Australia and we should be proud of Witness K," Ms Shackleton told reporters in Dili.

"It's wrong and we should be proud of them, he's just being punished for telling the truth and we can't have that in Australia."

She said she was disappointed not to speak to Mr Morrison as that was why she had travelled to Dili, but was grateful Ms Payne had promised to hand over the petition and address the issue with the prime minister.

"I could see she was definitely going to do that, why else would she offer, she probably feels like I do that what is happening is wrong," Ms Schackleton said.

She said she would "wait and see" if the prime minister was swayed by the petition ahead of Mr Collaery's trial with Witness K to plead guilty.