

# **Demand a fair go for East Timor**

May 2004

*"East Timor needs the royalties from its hydrocarbon resources to provide for schools, hospitals and roads."* **Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown**

The Australian Government wants to deprive East Timor of up to \$8.5 billion in royalties from gas resources in the Greater Sunrise field of the Timor Sea. This threatens East Timor's capacity to provide basic services and a decent future for its people who live in the poorest country in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Greater Sunrise field is one of several resource-rich areas in the Timor Sea between Australia and East Timor. The seabed boundary determines how these resources are allocated but the boundary between Australia and East Timor has never been defined.

Australia is relying on the boundary agreed in the 1970s with the former Suharto government of Indonesia, before Indonesia invaded East Timor. A large area of the boundary was left unresolved at the time because Portugal, East Timor's former colonial administrator, did not agree with the proposal. This area is known as the Timor Gap.

The prospect of revenue from oil and gas in the Timor Gap prompted Suharto and the Hawke Labor government to negotiate an agreement in 1989, the Timor Gap Treaty, to enable joint exploitation of resources in this area.

The old boundary and agreement deprive East Timor of territory and the resources of the seabed that, according to international law, belong to the new nation. East Timor wants the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to determine the matter but the Howard government has refused, preferring to drag out negotiations and in the meantime to take the oil and gas royalties.

For example, under the Greater Sunrise agreement, Australia takes 82 per cent of the royalties from the Greater Sunrise field, estimated at \$8.5 billion, leaving East Timor with 18 per cent.

## **Australian parliament ratifies unfair agreement**

Federal parliament ratified the Greater Sunrise agreement in March, a move the Australian Greens opposed. We moved amendments to force the Australian government to settle the boundary dispute quickly and if not, then to require the matter to go to the ICJ. Neither Labor nor the Coalition supported our proposals.

The Howard government now wants East Timor to ratify the Greater Sunrise agreement by passing legislation in its national parliament. But the Prime Minister of East Timor, Mari Alkatiri, says the agreement is unfair and will deprive the new nation of revenue to fund schools and health care. It is, he said, "literally, a matter of life and death".

The Australian Greens support East Timor's call for a fair go. The funds are badly needed for reconstruction and development. Senator Bob Brown went to Dili in April to discuss the issue with Mr Alkatiri, East Timor President Xanana Gusmao, and community groups.

The Greens will continue to stand with the East Timorese who are demanding nothing more than what is their right – access to resources worth billions of dollars that will help this struggling nation lift its people out of poverty.

### **Take action now**

You can help secure a just settlement. Please write a letter, send an email or telephone in support of East Timor, stating that:

- Australia should stop undermining East Timor's economic independence and settle fair and permanent maritime boundaries as soon as possible.
- Australia should cease issuing licences to explore or exploit oil and gas in the disputed areas of the Timor Sea.
- A trust fund should be established for Australian revenue derived from the disputed oil and gas fields, to be released when the sea boundaries are agreed.
- If the boundary dispute remains unresolved by the end of 2005, the matter should be referred to the International Court of Justice for resolution.

Write to Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Opposition foreign spokesperson Kevin Rudd at Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, 2600, or call them on 02 6277 7111.

You can also:

- Request a meeting with your local federal MP to discuss the issue.
- Write a letter to the editor of The Australian ([letter@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:letter@theaustralian.com.au)) or the major newspaper in your capital city.
- Call talkback radio.
- Talk to your friends, family and colleagues about why the Howard government's position is unfair.

**For more information, visit <http://www.bobbrown.org.au> or call 03 6234 1633.**

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