The Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries
Maritime Boundaries

The sovereignty of nations is defined by their borders with other countries. These borders are on the land and, for island nations such as ours, in the sea. After our 24-year struggle for self-determination we are now a proudly independent nation. Although we have settled 98% of our land border with Indonesia we are yet to settle the sea border - our maritime boundary - with our neighbours Australia and Indonesia.

When our maritime boundary is settled what is on Timor-Leste’s side of the boundary line, in the sea and under the sea bed, will be internationally recognised as belonging to Timor-Leste.

Timor-Leste has no maritime boundary in the Timor-Sea.

There are only provisional arrangements to manage oil and gas activities. The Government of Timor-Leste has made it a national priority to finalise our maritime boundaries, according to the principles of international law, so we can enjoy full sovereignty over both our land and our seas.

“One of our priorities is to ensure the clear delimitation of our maritime and land boundaries in accordance with international law.”
Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo
Inauguration Speech
Swearing in of the VI Constitutional Government
16 February 2015.


The United Nations recognises that islands and coastal nations have rights over defined areas of the sea and the seabed. Nations around the world have put great effort into defining and finalising their maritime boundaries in accordance with arrangements set out in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Timor-Leste, Australia and Indonesia are all signatories to this international convention and Australia has settled permanent maritime boundaries with all its neighbours except Timor-Leste.¹

All signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea have obligations to reach final agreements on maritime boundaries and where they enter into provisional arrangements like those in the Timor Sea they are “not to jeopardize or hamper the reaching of the final agreement.”²

International law supports a maritime boundary based on the median line as the starting point for negotiations. This is a line drawn in the middle of the two coastlines.
The Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries


In October 2014 the National Parliament passed Resolution No. 12/2014 authorising the formation of a body to coordinate and manage Timor-Leste’s efforts to achieve a permanent maritime boundary. This body is the Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries.

The Council has been established by Government Decree Law No. 08/2015 published 22 April 2015 as a government agency accountable directly to the Prime Minister.

It encompasses three entities:

- the Consultative Commission;
- the Maritime Boundary Office; and
- the Negotiation Team.
The Consultative Commission

The Consultative Commission is the consultative body on issues relating to the final delimitation of maritime boundaries.

It is chaired by the Prime Minister and comprised of eminent leaders of the nation including former Presidents, former Prime Ministers, former Presidents of the National Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and other Ministers whose participation is deemed by the chair to be relevant.

The Prime Minister can invite leading members of political parties represented in National Parliament, representatives of Civil Society, experts, and other citizens with the necessary reputation, experience, wisdom, and background to become members of the Commission.

The Maritime Boundary Office

The Maritime Boundary Office is responsible for the executive management of the Council and coordinates all efforts toward securing final boundaries.

The Office is lead by a Chief Executive Officer and performs all administrative functions of the Council, supports the Consultative Commission and the Negotiation Team, briefs the chair and develops and maintains a library of resources.

It will also seek legal and technical advice, develop policy and strategy and facilitate outreach and community engagement.
The Negotiation Team

The Negotiation Team, led by the Chief Negotiator, is responsible for conducting any negotiations related to maritime boundaries, except for ministerial-level interactions.

The Chief Negotiator is appointed by the Prime Minister and the team includes national and international advisors and external consultants.

“… while I am no longer Prime Minister, I am continuing to pursue my long cherished goal of achieving full sovereignty for our nation as we continue to work for a permanent maritime boundary that is properly determined by international law.”

Minister, H.E. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão
Minister for Planning and Strategic Investment
Australian National University,
16 March 2015

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are we prioritising this issue now?

A: The Government of Timor-Leste has always wanted to finalise permanent maritime boundaries and our laws reflect this position.

Now, 13 years since the restoration of independence, we are ready to finally secure our full sovereignty and replace the provisional arrangements in the Timor Sea with a permanent maritime boundary.

We are ready to move forward respectfully to finalise our maritime boundaries in accordance with the principles of international law.

We also need to provide certainty for companies seeking to invest in exploration and extraction activities in the Timor Sea.

“We believe international law supports our claim for a maritime boundary that is at the midpoint between our countries and with eastern and western lines that reflect relevant geographic features.”

Former Prime Minister, H.E. Dr. Mari Alkatiri
19 April 2004
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is happening in relation to our borders with Indonesia?

A: The President of Timor-Leste, H.E. Taur Matan Ruak, noted in his Independence Day Speech:

“In April, I met Indonesian President Joko Widodo. He and I agreed to immediately give a renewed boost to the negotiation of the borders between Timor-Leste and Indonesia, especially the sea border.”

“President of Timor-Leste H.E. Taur Matan Ruak

Commemoration of the 13th Anniversary of the Restoration of Independence
Maliana, 20 May 2015

Approximately 98% per cent of the land border between Indonesia and Timor-Leste has been settled. Negotiations have been positive and constructive.

Working with the whole of Government the Maritime Boundary Council will be responsible for all future maritime boundary negotiations with Indonesia, except negotiations at the Ministerial level.

Q: What is happening with Australia?

A: Recent talks have produced no substantive engagement on maritime borders. The talks took place during a six-month suspension of two legal cases filed by Timor-Leste against Australia. Timor-Leste agreed to Australia’s request for this suspension in September 2014.

Timor-Leste will continue to seek engagement with Australia to settle a maritime boundary between our two countries based on the principles of international law.

"We respect Australia as a good neighbour, a very open and friendly neighbour, who has helped us in the past and understood our claims about our sovereignty. We do not expect that Australia will have to be charitable with Timor-Leste, we only expect that Australia will respect our rights."

“Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo

Interview with Australian Newspaper “The Age”
Published 19 February 2015"
“Timor-Leste hopes to see Australia put action to its declared principles, and remains optimistic that the leaders of our great neighbour will demonstrate courage and commit to a clear course of negotiations to settle the maritime boundaries between our two countries once and for all. Timor-Leste’s Sixth Constitutional Government under the leadership of Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo is prepared to take all necessary measures to work with our neighbour Australia in this process, and to complete the delimitation of our country’s sovereign territories through the drawing of permanent boundaries.”

Minister of State, H.E. Agio Pereira

Media Release of the Spokesperson of the Sixth Constitutional Government
3 May 2015

End Notes

3. The CEO of the Maritime Boundary Office is Ms Elizabeth Exposto appointed by Prime Ministerial Dispatch No 007/2015/VIGC/PM