

# Timor-Leste's Maritime Boundaries with Indonesia

**T**imor-Leste and Indonesia enjoy a close and enduring relationship and have emerged as a global model for reconciliation and constructive partnership. As neighbouring countries across both land and sea, bordering each other to the north, west and east, the two nations have an obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to delimit their overlapping maritime entitlements in order to clarify the extent of their sovereignty and sovereign rights.

Following the successful conclusion of the compulsory conciliation with Australia under the UNCLOS, and the signing of the 2018 Treaty between Timor-Leste and Australia establishing their Maritime Boundary in the Timor Sea, Timor-Leste has turned its attention to the delimitation of its remaining maritime boundaries with Indonesia.

The 2018 Maritime Boundary Treaty between Timor-Leste and Australia is expressly without prejudice to the negotiation and delimitation of maritime boundaries between Timor-Leste and Indonesia.



## Why are maritime boundaries so important to Timor-Leste?

Completing permanent maritime boundaries is a matter of national priority for Timor-Leste. This is the final step in fully establishing its sovereignty and sovereign rights as an independent state.

For the Timorese people, securing rights over the nation's maritime areas is a continuation of their long struggle for self-determination, sovereignty and independence.

Clear and agreed maritime boundaries provide legal certainty and enable Timor-Leste to responsibly explore, manage, protect and develop its marine and offshore resources, including energy and fisheries. This, in turn, supports sustainable economic development, encourages investment and business confidence and strengthens long-term national planning.

Revenues derived from these resources contribute to Timor-Leste's sovereign wealth fund, which is dedicated to supporting intergenerational equity and building a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for the Timorese people.

## Has Indonesia settled maritime boundaries with its other neighbours?

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic State in the world, comprising over 17,000 islands. It shares maritime boundaries with ten States. Indonesia has now agreed or partially agreed on maritime boundaries with Malaysia, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, India, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam and the Philippines. Of these, Timor-Leste and Palau are the only countries with whom Indonesia is yet to reach any maritime boundary agreement; however Indonesia has started discussions with both.

## What is the status of maritime boundary negotiations with Indonesia?

The leaders of Timor-Leste and Indonesia agreed in August 2015 to renew and expand bilateral discussions to cover both land and maritime boundaries. Timor-Leste commenced discussions with Indonesia regarding the permanent delimitation of maritime boundaries in September 2015.

During the initial phase of consultations, the two countries jointly developed a set of guiding principles, technical methodologies and a work plan for the negotiations. Both States committed to negotiating a permanent maritime boundary in accordance with international law, particularly UNCLOS.

Preliminary technical meetings between Timor-Leste and Indonesia were held in late 2018 in Bali and in early 2019 in Singapore and in Bali. These meetings laid important groundwork for future negotiations.

Since late 2021, Timor-Leste and Indonesia have continued to engage through diplomatic channels to advance the peaceful delimitation of their maritime boundary, in accordance with international law and in the spirit of close neighbourly relations. These efforts have included high-level exchanges and informal meetings aimed at building mutual understanding and paving the way for formal and substantive negotiations.

These sustained engagements led to an important milestone with agreement to commence formal maritime boundary negotiations in 2024. Two rounds of negotiations were subsequently held in 2025: in August in Dili and in December in Yogyakarta. Formal maritime boundary negotiations are ongoing.

Timor-Leste's delegation is led by Ms Elizabeth Exposto, Chief Executive Officer of the Land and Maritime Boundary Office and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, under the direction and leadership of H.E. Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão.

## What are the areas subject to delimitation?

Timor-Leste has four unresolved maritime segments with Indonesia, namely:

- on the South coast, in the Timor Sea, there is a need to negotiate a maritime boundary to the west and to the east;
- in the North, the Oe-Cusse enclave raises special issues because it is surrounded by Indonesia;
- there are also two sections in the seas from Batugade to Atauro Island and through the Wetar Strait down to Jaco Island that require delimitation.