

AUSTRALIA SUPPORTING TIMOR LESTE'S FUTURE



Timor Leste is one of Australia's closest neighbours and the relationship between our two nations is strong - forged at the beginning of Timor's nationhood and continued through shared management of oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea.

The Greens believe that Australia should be a neighbour to Timor Leste. Timor Leste is one of the poorest nations in the world with half the population living on less than \$1 a day. Access to basic health care and food security is only gradually improving. 82% of households do not have access to electricity and 98% use firewood as their primary source of energy.ⁱ Timor Leste is working to establish a peaceful society after decades of conflict during Indonesia's 24-year occupation.

The Greens are committed to helping Timor Leste build a safe and sustainable future. This will deliver diplomatic and economic benefits – cementing our friendly relationship, increasing business interaction between our two countries, and enhancing the stability and security of our region. All support should be directed in consultation with the Timorese.

The Greens advocate the following commitments to Timor Leste:

- ***Join the Timor Leste Parliament in rejecting the proposal to open an asylum seeker processing facility in Timor Leste***
- ***Vote with the Timor Leste Government in the Sunrise Commission and Joint Commission in support of a pipeline from the Greater Sunrise gas field to Timor Leste***
- ***Make the following improvements to Australia's development assistance program:***
 - Match the Australian community's donations to NGOs working in Timor Leste, or at least increase development assistance delivered through NGOs to 10% of the Aid budget.
 - \$5 million a year over 10 years to train local technicians to install and service remote area power systems for household power and lighting in 50,000 households across Timor Leste.ⁱⁱ
 - Extend the Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme to Timorese nationals and enhance the program so it teaches them how to add value to agricultural products and farm more efficiently.
 - Fund the existing community-level NGOs and cooperatives that are working to increase farmers' knowledge and use of low-cost, low-input sustainable agriculture for local consumption.

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- Expand and reorient the education component of the Timor Leste aid program to:
 - o provide additional scholarships and teaching places at the national university in Dili;
 - o establish technical skills training facilities in rural areas to teach the skills needed in local industries, such as the oil, gas and renewable energy industries that will emerge under the initiatives outlined here;
 - o support primary and secondary education, especially the retention of girls;
 - o establish public libraries in 20 rural communities.
- Increase our current aid spending on health from 16 percent to at least 20 percent, and deliver our health funds as part of a tripartite arrangement involving Cuba training 1,000 Timorese doctors and Australia providing health infrastructure and public health programs.

No asylum seeker detention and processing facility for Timor Leste

The Greens are opposed to offshore processing of asylum seekers. We believe it is an abrogation of Australia's obligations under the Refugee Convention to refuse to process asylum claims on mainland Australia. The Greens support the position of the Parliament of Timor Leste, which voted unanimously to reject Australia's plan for an asylum seeker processing centre in Timor Leste. We share the concerns of a number of non-government organisations and churches about the detrimental impact such a scheme would have on Timor Lesteⁱⁱⁱ.

A fair go for Timor Leste – right to onshore gas processing

Timor Leste is seeking Australian Government support for construction of a gas pipeline from the Greater Sunrise gas field in the Timor Sea to Timor Leste. This would bring jobs and



cleaner fuel to Timor Leste. However, the Australian Government is leaving the decision to Woodside, the owner of the rights to the gas at Greater Sunrise, who favour processing the gas on a floating LNG facility with construction and operational support from Darwin.

A pipeline to Timor Leste would create an estimated 3,000 construction jobs for 3-5 years, and 300-500 permanent jobs^{iv}. It could replace the highly polluting imported heavy fuel oil used for electricity generation, support an LNG manufacturing and export industry, and provide LPG for cooking rather than firewood (which is responsible for deforestation, erosion, and increasing sedimentation in the river and coastal areas)^v. The Greens would support the Timor Leste Government's efforts to secure these significant benefits.

Aid must be focused on local development

Australia is one of Timor Leste's largest aid donors, giving \$94.7 million in 2009 - 10^{vi}. However, some of this funding is misdirected. The Greens have two major concerns:

1. Over-emphasis on the security sector – too much is spent on the Australian Federal Police presence and training of local police and defence personnel rather than measures to boost social and economic development.
2. Too much going to Australian consultants – The Australian National Audit Office found that more than half of the aid budget is going to highly paid Australian experts for 'technical assistance'^{vii}. Between 1999 and 2009, only about 10% of the \$5.2 billion allocated for Timor Leste entered the East Timorese economy^{viii}.

The Greens would reorient the aid budget to support local health, education, renewable energy and rural development initiatives.

Matched funding for non-government organisations

In 2008, the Australian community donated \$9.7 million to Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) for projects in Timor Leste, while the Australian government only provided them with \$4.1 million^{ix}. To get more of our development dollars supporting locally driven projects, the Greens believe that the Australian Government should match the community's donations to Australian NGOs and direct greater funding to the NGO sector in Timor Leste.



Offering Australia's remote renewable energy expertise

Basic electricity is essential for the development and well-being of Timor Leste's rural communities. 80% of Timor Leste's population lives in remote rural areas and relies on depleting reserves of firewood for cooking. Even if a national electricity grid is fully developed by 2020, at least 64 000 households will remain disconnected^x.

Australia has decades of experience establishing remote renewable energy power systems in remote and regional Australia, such as decentralised small household solar power, biogas, or innovative hybrid mini grids utilising solar, wind, hydro and biofuels. Yet we only offer marginal support for renewable energy initiatives in Timor Leste. The Greens favour a much stronger emphasis on sharing our unique expertise in this area.

Supporting rural development – increasing skills in agriculture

Timor Leste struggles to feed itself, even though 80% of the population are subsistence farmers. During 2009, much of Timor Leste's \$280 million worth of imported merchandise consisted of basic foodstuffs. There is an urgent need to develop the agricultural sector, and Australia is well placed to help.

In August 2008, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao made a request for East Timorese workers to be included in the fruit pickers in Australia's guest worker scheme. The scheme allows people from Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to work in Australia for seven months a year, over three years. Employers must foot half the workers' return airfares, pay award wages and arrange accommodation. The scheme has only had limited success but could be designed in a more targeted way to provide income for Timorese communities and to increase their skills in fruit and vegetable growing and processing.

Increasing support for local tertiary education

Australia presently awards a small number of tertiary scholarships to students from Timor Leste. While this provides some benefit to Timor Leste, it can result in the beneficiaries joining the global market for professionals rather than taking their skills back home. It also injects substantial funds into Australian institutions rather than building the capacity of Timorese universities.



Greater benefits could be achieved by funding scholarships at the Timor Leste national university and providing incentives for Australian academics to work there. Education facilities with a technical focus could be established in regional centres such as Baucau and Los Palos, boosting rural development and leading to employment in local industries. Local libraries in rural areas would also help significantly, as would funding for primary and secondary schooling, particularly the retention of girls.

Health

The Greens would support a tripartite arrangement between Australia, Cuba and Timor Leste to build Timor Leste's health system. Cuba has committed to train a thousand Timorese doctors^{xi}, and the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister has expressed an interest in working with Cuba on health in the region. With doctor training provided by Cuba, Australia could best help with health infrastructure and public health programs.

End notes:

- i United Nations Poverty Environment Initiative - http://www.unpei.org/programmes/country_profiles/timor-leste.asp
- ii Based on \$1,000 per household providing a solar array that will power approximately 3 – 4 light bulbs.
- iii For example - http://news.nsw.uca.org.au/2010/protestant-church_14-07-2010.htm and
- iv Email correspondence with Timor-Leste Government officials, March 2010
- v Conversation with local development watchdog Laohamutuk - <http://www.laohamutuk.org>
- vi 2009-10 Budget estimate
- vii http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/2009-10_Audit_Report_15.pdf
- viii La'o Hamutuk (2009) 'How much money have international donors spent on and in Timor Leste?', pamphlet, Dili, 23 August
- ix ACFID, 2010
- x Rural Energy policy 2008, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17291145/Rural-Energy-Policy-for-TimorLeste>
- xi Stephen Smith, Joint Press Conference with Mr Bruno Rodriguez, Cuban Foreign Minister, Perth, 8 June 2010