

Ramos Horta attacks Woodside CEOs

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BY Tara Ravens

East Timor President Jose Ramos Horta has used an address to the Northern Territory parliament to attack executives at Australia's second largest oil and gas producer, calling them "dogmatic and political".

East Timor is drawing up plans for a pipeline and petrochemicals plant to process oil and gas from the lucrative Greater Sunrise field.

Australian company Woodside Petroleum is on the other side of the high-stakes battle, wanting to build a 530-kilometre pipeline running south to Darwin.

It says laying a pipeline to East Timor would undercut profits and expose supplies to political upheaval.

But Mr Ramos Horta countered the claims during his address to NT parliament, saying East Timor was less than half the distance Darwin was from the field, estimated to contain \$US90 billion (\$A107.94 billion) in oil and gas.

East Timor also offered as much security and had more generous tax laws, he said.

"The pipeline should go where ... it is the shortest route and the cheapest.

"Timor Leste cannot and will not bow to pressures of the Woodside CEO millionaires."

Australia currently has about 1,000 peacekeeping forces stationed in the nation and Mr Ramos Horta thanked the government for its "steadfast" assistance.

He also acknowledged the role Darwin played in his recovery from an attempt on his life by rebel soldiers in February this year.

But, he said, the future of East Timor - which became South-East Asia's youngest democracy in 2002 - had to come first.

"Our sincere gratitude cannot be such that we surrender all to Darwin," he said.

In a pointed attack, Mr Ramos Horta called Woodside CEOs "dogmatic and political".

"We will not bow to unilateral decisions made by these CEOs that manage or mismanage multinationals," he said.

The president - who was officially welcomed to parliament with a tri-service military guard - implored Sunrise to explore "all options".

"Woodside seems to think it should be based on patriotic reasons, because Woodside is Australian it should come to Darwin.

"We view it more as a practical and multinational enterprise: it goes where independent, credible scientists recommend it should go...

"Woodside executives are the ones who seem to be dogmatic and political."

Mr Ramos Horta also reminded those present that the gas project would provide a rare opportunity for one of Asia's poorest and smallest countries.

"I love Australia, I feel very much part of it, the blood in my body is Australian, donated by young Australian soldiers," he said.

"But I love my country and people even more..."

"You are rich and powerful, so I have to side with my people who are weaker and poorer. I hope you understand this."

The Greater Sunrise field lies almost entirely in territory claimed by both countries and neither can exploit it without approval from the other side.

Under the current licensing agreement the countries have until 2013 to sign a development plan.