

New Malaysia plane search area turns up objects

March 28 2014, by Gillian Wong



Royal Australia Air Force C-17 lands at RAAF Base Pearce to deliver a Sea Hawk helicopter to help with the search for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, in Perth, Australia, Friday, March 28, 2014. Australian officials moved the search area for the lost Malaysian jetliner 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) to the northeast Friday, following a new analysis of radar data, and a plane quickly found objects that a ship set out to investigate. (AP Photo/Rob Griffith)

Australian officials moved the search area for the lost Malaysian jetliner 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) to the northeast Friday following a new

analysis of radar data, and planes quickly found multiple objects in the new zone.

Five out of 10 aircraft hunting for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 found objects of various colors Friday, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority said. It said it was not clear whether the objects were from the [plane](#), and photos of them would be analyzed overnight.

AMSA said the items included two rectangular objects that were blue and grey—among the colors of the missing plane. A Chinese patrol ship in the area will attempt to locate the objects on Saturday, it said.

The three-week hunt for the jet has been filled with possible sightings, with hundreds of objects identified by satellite and others by plane, but so far not a single piece of debris has been confirmed.

Australian officials said they turned away from the old search area, which they had combed for a week, because a new analysis of radar data suggests the plane had flown faster and therefore ran out of fuel more quickly than previously estimated. The new area is closer to land and has calmer weather than the old one, which will make searching easier.

"We have moved on" from the old search area, said John Young, manager of AMSA's emergency response division.

The [radar data](#) that was re-analyzed was received soon after Flight 370 lost communications and veered from its scheduled path March 8. The Beijing-bound flight carrying 239 people turned around soon after taking off from Kuala Lumpur, flew west toward the Strait of Malacca and disappeared from radar.

The search area has changed several times since the plane vanished as experts analyzed a frustratingly small amount of data from the aircraft,

including the radar signals and "pings" that a satellite picked up for several hours after radar and voice contact was lost.

The latest analysis indicated the aircraft was traveling faster than previously estimated, resulting in increased fuel use and reducing the possible distance it could have flown before going down in the Indian Ocean. Just as a car loses gas efficiency when driving at high speeds, a plane will get less out of a tank of fuel when it flies faster.

Malaysia's civil aviation chief, Azharuddin Abdul Rahman, told reporters in Kuala Lumpur that personnel at Boeing Co. in Seattle had helped with the analysis of the flight.

Planes and ships had spent a week searching about 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles) southwest of Perth, Australia, the base for the search. Now they are searching about 1,850 kilometers (1,150 miles) west of the city.

"This is our best estimate of the area in which the aircraft is likely to have crashed into the ocean," Martin Dolan, chief commissioner of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, said at a news conference in Canberra.

He said a wide range of scenarios went into the calculation. "We're looking at the data from the so-called pinging of the satellite, the polling of the satellites, and that gives a distance from a satellite to the aircraft to within a reasonable approximation," he said. He said that information was coupled with various projections of aircraft performance and the plane's distance from the satellites at given times.



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Dolan said the search now is for surface debris to give an indication of "where the main aircraft wreckage is likely to be. This has a long way to go."

A number of the objects spotted Friday were white or light in color, AMSA said, adding that the finds needed to be confirmed by ship.

Young said the hundreds of floating objects detected over the last week by satellites in the former search area, previously considered possible wreckage, "may or may not actually be objects."

"In regards to the old areas, we have not seen any debris and I would not wish to classify any of the satellite imagery as debris, nor would I want to classify any of the few visual sightings that we made as debris. That's just not justifiable from what we have seen," he said.

But in Malaysia, Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said at a news conference that because of ocean drifts, "this new search area could still be consistent with the potential objects identified by various satellite images over the past week."

The new search area is about 80 percent smaller than the old one, but it remains large: about 319,000 square kilometers (123,000 square miles), about the size of Poland or New Mexico.

Sea depths in the new area range from 2,000 meters (6,560 feet) to 4,000 meters (13,120 feet), Young said. There are trenches in the area that go even deeper, Australia's national science agency said in a statement. That includes the Diamantina trench, which is up to 7,300 meters (24,000 feet) deep, but it was unclear whether the deepest parts of the trench are in the search area.

If the wreckage is especially deep, that will complicate search efforts. The U.S. Navy is sending equipment that can hear "black box" pings up to about 6,100 meters (20,000 feet) deep, and an unmanned underwater vehicle that operates at depths up to 4,500 meters (14,800 feet).

Young said a change in search area is not unusual.

"This is the normal business of search and rescue operations—that new information comes to light, refined analyses take you to a different place," Young told reporters. "I don't count the original work as a waste of time."

He said the new search zone, being about 700 kilometers (434 miles) closer to mainland Australia, will be easier to reach. Planes used so much fuel getting to and from the old search area that had only about two hours of spotting time per sortie.



Ground crew unload a Sea Hawk helicopter from a Royal Australia Air Force C-17 after it landed at RAAF Base Pearce to help with the search for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 in Perth, Australia, Friday, March 28, 2014. Australian officials moved the search area for the lost Malaysian jetliner 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) to the northeast Friday, following a new analysis of radar data, and a plane quickly found objects that a ship set out to investigate. (AP Photo/Rob Griffith)

The new area also has better weather conditions than the old one, where searches were regularly scrapped because of storms, high winds and low visibility.

"The search area has moved out of the 'roaring 40s,' which creates very adverse weather," Young said, referring to the latitude of the previous search area. "I'm not sure that we'll get perfect weather out there, but it's likely to be better than we saw in the past."

Australia's HMAS Success was expected to arrive in the area Saturday, Young said. The Chinese Maritime Safety Administration patrol boat Haixun 01 was also on site, and several more Chinese ships were on their way.

Malaysian officials said earlier this week that satellite data confirmed the plane crashed into the southern Indian Ocean.

Authorities are rushing to find any piece of the plane to help them locate the black boxes, or flight data and voice recorders, that will help solve the mystery of why the jet flew so far off-course. The battery in a black box normally lasts for at least a month.

Officials are already preparing for the hunt for the black boxes. The U.S. Navy towed pinger locator and Bluefin-21 autonomous underwater vehicle are to be fitted onto an Australian vessel, the Ocean Shield, when it reaches Albany, a port near Perth, in a day or two, said a government official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.



An Royal Australian Air Force AP-3 Orion aircraft takes off from Pearce Airbase, north of Perth, Australia, Friday, March 28, 2014. Planes are searching a new area of the Indian Ocean for possible signs of the missing Malaysian airliner flight MH370 after a new analysis of radar data suggests the plane flew faster than thought, used up more fuel and cut the distance it traveled, Australian officials said Friday. (AP Photo/Greg Wood, Pool)

He did not say how long it would take to reach the search area. He said the Chinese ships are also expected to have acoustic sensors that can listen for [black box](#) pingers.

The lack of results from the search gave one Malaysian family a little hope that the authorities were wrong in their calculations.

Eliz Wong Yun Yi, 24, whose father was on the plane, said her family stopped watching the daily Malaysian news conference because they felt the government was not upfront with information. All the new satellite data added to the confusion, she said.

"After so many days, still no plane. We will not believe what they say until the plane wreckage is found. I want to stay positive and believe that my father will come back," she said. Her father, Wong Sai Sang, a 53-year-old Malaysian property sales manager, had been on his way to Beijing for work.

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