

# Science still at heart of solving MH370 mystery

August 4 2015, by Rob Payne

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“The Boeing 777 is a very robust airplane and it could well be that only a few wing flaps broke away,” Mr Thomas says. Credit: Christian Junker - AHKGAP

The discovery of a Boeing 777 flaperon on Reunion Island has vaulted Malaysian Airlines flight 370's disappearance into world headlines again,

but is intensive media interest bringing us closer to the truth?

For example, some experts have attributed the flaperon's good condition to a gentle ocean splashdown, while others say it likely snapped off in a steep, violent descent.

## So who is right?

"It's very difficult to draw any conclusions about what this particular piece means in the context of where the airplane is exactly or how it broke up," airlineratings.com aviation expert Geoffrey Thomas says.

"There are people who postulate all sorts of theories including that the pilot glided the plane in for a perfect landing and then sank it deliberately.

"But in the [southern ocean](#), calm is a three-metre swell, so this isn't a 'miracle on the Hudson' scenario.

"Really all this does is to dispel [conspiracy theories](#) about the plane being secretly flown to Russia or Afghanistan."

Media has also suggested the washed up wing piece can help pinpoint the wreckage and black box.

This could perhaps be done by working backwards through a University of Western Australia particle theory model which predicted debris would wash up on Reunion Island.

UWA Professor of Coastal Oceanography Charitha Pattiaratchi says this is wishful thinking.

"There are too many pathways and too many currents. They have to find

more debris in different areas to have a better fixture [on the route]," Prof Pattiaratchi says.

## **Flaperon find may be the sole piece of wreckage**

However, more debris may never arrive, for two reasons: 15 months on, much of it might have sunk or been broken up by the ocean; and lessons from the Asiana 214 crash in San Francisco in 2013.

"Asiana 214 impacted a seawall and did a cartwheel, yet essentially stayed intact, with most of the damage done by fire afterwards," Mr Thomas says.

"The Boeing 777 is a very robust airplane and it could well be that only a few wing flaps broke away."

University of New England Forensic Criminology Senior Lecturer Dr Xanthé Mallett says now more ever investigators need to focus on science and facts.

"People can survive unimaginable loss and trauma, if they can only be told why," she says.

"Why their loved one disappeared and has never [been] heard from again.

"But as forensic experts we have to be very careful not to guess about what happened—even when trying to help—as speculation isn't going to bring anyone peace.

Provided by Science Network WA

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