Drift analysis says MH370 likely crashed north of search

April 21 2017, by Rod Mcguirk

In this July 29, 2015 file photo, French police officers look over a piece of debris from a plane in Saint-Andre, Reunion Island. The wing was later found to be from missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing March 8, 2014, with 239 people aboard while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Analysis of a genuine Boeing 777 wing flap has reaffirmed experts' opinion that a missing Malaysian airliner most likely crashed north of an abandoned search area in the Indian Ocean, officials said Friday, April 21, 2017. The search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 ended in January after a deep-sea sonar scan failed to find any trace of the plane. But research has continued in an effort to refine a possible new search. (AP Photo/Lucas Marie, File)

Analysis of a genuine Boeing 777 wing flap has reaffirmed experts' opinion that a missing Malaysian airliner most likely crashed north of an abandoned search area in the Indian Ocean, officials said Friday.

The $160 million search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 ended in January after a deep-sea sonar scan of 120,000 square kilometers (46,000 square miles) of ocean floor southwest of Australia failed to find any trace of the Boeing 777 that vanished with 239 people aboard on March 8, 2014. But research has continued in an effort to refine a possible new search.

Australian government oceanographers had obtained a wing flap of the same model as the original and studied how that part drifted in the ocean, the Australian Transport safety Bureau said in a statement. Previous drift modeling used inexact replicas.

The new analysis confirmed findings released in December that the airliner had likely crashed north of the searched area.

The December findings were based in part on drift analysis of six replicas of a piece of Flight 370 known as a flaperon which was found on Reunion Island in the west Indian Ocean in July 2015.

David Griffin, an Australian government oceanographer who worked on replica analysis, said the new research confirmed his suspicion that an actual flaperon would drift faster and to the left of the replicas' course.

It supported the December review's findings by a team of international and Australian experts who re-examined all the data used to define the original search zone that the wreckage was most likely within a 25,000-square kilometer (9,700-square mile) area on the northern boundary of the last search zone.

"We cannot be absolutely certain, but that is where all the evidence we have points us, and this new work leaves us more confident in our findings," Griffin said in a statement.

The findings add weight to calls of victims' families for governments to resume the search for the airliner that flew far off course during a flight from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia to Beijing.

Malaysia, China and Australia have agreed that the search will remain suspended unless new evidence emerges that would pinpoint the plane's exact location.

Australia has conducted the search on Malaysia's behalf. France is conducting its own investigation and has not handed over the Reunion Island flaperon to the wider investigation.