

# Scientists potentially narrow MH370 search area to 3 spots

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In this March 31, 2014 file photo, HMAS Success scans the southern Indian Ocean, near the coast of Western Australia, as a Royal New Zealand Air Force P3 Orion flies over, while searching for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370. Scientists have potentially narrowed the search area for the missing Malaysian airliner to three specific locations in the southern Indian Ocean, through new satellite and drift analysis of the 2014 crash released Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2017. (AP Photo/Rob Griffith, File)

Scientists have potentially narrowed the search area for the missing

Malaysian airliner to three specific locations in the southern Indian Ocean through new satellite and drift analysis of the 2014 crash released Wednesday.

But the Australian Transport Safety Bureau cautioned that the drift analysis by Australian science agency CSIRO is based on French satellite images of "probably man-made" floating objects without evidence that they were from Malaysia Airlines Flight 370.

Still, the locations could provide potential starting points to search within a 25,000-square-kilometer (9,700-square-mile) expanse identified by a panel of experts in November as the most likely resting place of the Boeing 777 and the 239 passengers and crew on board.

That expanse adjoins the original search zone far southwest of Australia that was identified through satellite analysis of the final hours of the flight, which apparently ended when the plane ran out of fuel.

Malaysia, China and Australia agreed to suspend the deep-sea sonar search in January after 120,000 square kilometers (46,000 square miles) of seabed were combed without finding any trace of Flight 370.

The new analysis is based on French military satellite images gathered on March 23, 2014—two weeks after Flight 370 mysteriously veered far off course during a flight from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Beijing—that were taken near the original underwater search zone.

The Australian bureau took over the search for Flight 370 from Malaysia a week later. Satellite experts at Geoscience Australia were not asked to analyze the images until March this year. The experts concluded that a dozen objects appeared to be man-made.

CSIRO then investigated where the objects might have originated before

drifting for two weeks. CSIRO identified three potential crash sites—35.6 degrees S, 92.8 degrees E; 34.7 degrees S, 92.6 degrees E and 35.3 degrees S, 91.8 degrees E.

"So that is a way of potentially narrowing down the search area with the very important caveat that, of course, we can't be totally sure that those objects seen in the images are actual pieces of plane," CSIRO oceanographer David Griffin said.

"This might be a really good clue. It might be a red herring. But if you are going to search, then you'd be silly to ignore this potential clue," he added.

The Australian bureau's chief commissioner, Greg Hood, said in a statement, "Clearly we must be cautious" of the lack a definite link to Flight 370.

Malaysian Deputy Transport Minister Aziz Kaprawi said the civil aviation department would need to evaluate the data since it's based on satellite images from a few years ago. "We will need to verify the data to see if it's credible before we make any decision," Aziz told The Associated Press.

Malaysia, China and Australia have decided that the search will remain suspended unless new evidence pinpoints the wreckage's whereabouts.

But seabed exploration company Ocean Infinity, based in Houston, Texas, said last week it has offered to launch a private search for the Malaysian-registered airliner.

Voice370, a support group for victim's families, said under the terms of the offer made to Malaysia in April, Ocean Infinity "would like to be paid a reward if and only if it finds the main debris field." They urged

Malaysia to accept the offer.

Aziz said Wednesday that the offer was still being negotiated. He said there were some other "monetary terms" set by the firm that were unacceptable to the government.

"There are three categories of findings in the offer. The terms are a bit ambiguous," Aziz said. "The government wants the terms to be transparent and clear." He declined to give details.

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