

Confirmed MH370 Wing Part Won't Change Search: Australia

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Martin Dolan, chief commissioner of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, welcomed this week's news from France that the flaperon found on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion was part of the missing Boeing 777.

"We have been working on the assumption that the flaperon was associated with MH370," Dolan told AFP.

"It's useful to have formal confirmation of this, so it's good for us. But it hasn't actually made a significant difference to our search."

Australia is leading the difficult search in the southern Indian Ocean for the Malaysia Airlines plane which mysteriously diverted off course on March 8 last year and disappeared with 239 people on board.

Based on satellite analysis of the plane's likely trajectory, searchers are scouring the seabed off Australia's west coast, so far covering some 60,000 square kilometres (24,000 square miles) without result.

Dolan said Australia was considering bringing in new vessels and equipment to take advantage of the upcoming southern hemisphere summer when the weather in the harsh and remote place will improve.

"We are currently reviewing the options available to us to see whether we will acquire other

vessels and equipment for the summer period," he said. "We haven't made any decisions on that yet."

Dolan said finding the flaperon, a two-metre (almost seven foot) wing part on Reunion, a French overseas territory, in late July was consistent with drift modelling based on the plane crashing in the search area.

"It hasn't changed our thinking about the search area," he said, adding that the flaperon also had not yielded any clues on what caused the plane to disappear en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

"All we know is that the flaperon at some point became detached from the aircraft and there are a range of possible scenarios from that," he said.

"We will watch developments obviously but at this stage we haven't seen anything that actually assists in refining or changing the search area."

Dolan said he had hoped the flaperon would reveal more but had known from the start that, although interesting for the broader investigation, it was unlikely to assist in refining the search area.

The Australian official said he was still confident the plane would be found in the search area, which is scheduled to have been completely combed by the end of June 2016.

"There's still a lot of territory to cover and still a very high prospect that we will find the aircraft there," he said.

"If the aircraft is in the (search) area, which we think highly likely, then we will find it."

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