

MH370 search operations on right track, say Aussies

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Although doubts have been raised on whether searchers are looking in the right area for the missing Malaysian Airlines airliner MH370, authorities remain confident the search efforts are still on track.

Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) Chief Commissioner Martin Dolan said after continued analysis, experts from the Search Strategy Working Group (SSWG) still hold that MH370 had crashed south of an imaginary line known as the 'seventh arc' in the South Indian Ocean.

“At this stage, we are very confident that the aircraft is likely to be found in that search area and that is the search area we are focusing on,” he told a technical briefing in Kuala Lumpur today.

The ATSB is currently leading the search for MH370 in the South Indian Ocean centred along a long, curved line representing the aircraft’s last-known possible location after it sent its final satellite communication and where it is believed to have run out of fuel.

At a press conference just before the briefing, Australian Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss (left, pix above) dismissed claims that MH370 had been sighted flying over the Maldives and also allayed doubts raised on the search contractor Fugro’s track record.

He said while MH370 would have had enough fuel reach the Maldives, it wouldn't have had enough to go on much further or linger in the area.

“The claimed Maldives sightings are completely inconsistent with the satellite data that is available, it is inconsistent with the radar sightings that are available.

“MH370 wasn’t picked up by the Maldivian air traffic control or any other authorities in the area so it is not considered to be a likely possibility.

Search contractor doing well

“The experts are quite confident that aircraft lies within the area identified in the map and they are also quite confident that it will likely be in the southern end of that arc in the South Indian Ocean,” he said.

When asked on Fugro’s lack of a track record in conducting large-scale underwater searches, Truss said the contractor was performing well and had returned high-resolution images from the seabed despite the challenging conditions.

He said while he is disappointed that MH370 had yet to be found, he was confident that it

would be discovered with Fugro's resources if the aircraft is indeed in the search area.

Earlier, Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai (at right, pix above) told reporters the search to date had turned up over 220 Category Three objects, six Category Two objects, and one Category One object, all of which have been analysed.

Category Two and Three objects are sonar contacts found during the search that are deemed to of interest but not likely to be significant enough.

Category One objects are sonar contacts that are of sufficiently high interest to warrant immediate investigation.

Flight MH370 has been missing since March 8 last year and all 239 persons on board are presumed dead.

The Boeing 777-200ER aircraft was en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing at the time but mysteriously terminated communications and deviated from its flight path before disappearing.

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