

**Australian PM 'confident' signals from MH370, search chief disagrees**  
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Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott speaks to the media after meeting with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the state guest house in Tokyo on Monday. Abbott said today that he was very confident that signals detected in the search for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 were from the aircraft's blackbox. – Reuters pic, April 11, 2014. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said today that searchers were confident they knew the position of the black box flight recorders from missing flight MH370, but cautioned this was not the same as recovering wreckage.

"We are confident that we know the position of the black box flight recorders to be within some kilometres," he said in a speech in Shanghai, the Chinese commercial capital.

"Still, confidence in the approximate position of the black boxes is not the same as recovering wreckage from almost four and a half kilometres beneath the sea or finally determining all that happened on the flight."

However, Angus Houston, head of the Australian search, said that the analysis of the signal was unlikely to be related to the aircraft's black box recorders.

"On the information I have available to me, there has been no major breakthrough in the search for MH370," Houston added, following unconfirmed reports in some media that the black boxes had been located.

The Australian agency overseeing the search said it would use some of the most sophisticated resources at its disposal on the small search area after a new acoustic signal, that could be from the plane's black box recorders, was detected yesterday.

The latest ping seems to lend credence to four previous "pings" detected by a US navy "Towed Pinger Locator" towed by Australia's Ocean Shield vessel.

The mystery of flight MH370, which disappeared more than a month ago, has sparked the most expensive search and rescue operation in aviation history.

The black boxes record cockpit data and may provide answers about what happened to the plane, which was carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew when it vanished on March 8 and flew thousands of kilometres off its Kuala Lumpur-to-Beijing route.

But the batteries in the black boxes have already reached the end of their 30-day expected life, making efforts to swiftly locate them on the murky ocean floor all the more critical, Abbott said.

"We are now getting to the stage where the signal from what we are very confident is the black box is starting to fade and we are hoping to get as much information as we can before the signal finally expires," he said.

Search efforts are now focused on three areas.

Aircraft and ships are combing over two large search zones, some 2,390 km northwest of Perth, for possible floating debris related to the crash.

But it is the much smaller search zone, just 600 sq km, located about 1,670 km northwest of Perth that has generated fresh optimism.

The smaller zone is near where the Ocean Shield picked up the acoustic signals and where dozens of sonobuoys capable of transmitting data to search aircraft via radio signals were dropped on Wednesday.

But experts say the process of teasing out the signals from the cacophony of background noise in the sea is a slow and exhausting process.

An autonomous underwater vehicle named Bluefin-21 is on board the Ocean Shield and could be deployed to look for wreckage on the sea floor once a final search area has been identified. – Agencies, April 11, 2014.

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