

Officials says search area no smaller, denying Australian PM's statement on MH370
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The search area remains the same from earlier this week, say officials coordinating the search for MAS flight MH370. - April 11, 2014. The team coordinating the search for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has downplayed comments by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott earlier today that searchers were confident they knew the position of the black box flight recorders to be within "some kilometres".

A spokeswoman for the Joint Agency Co-ordination Centre (JACC), headed by Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston, said the overall search area remained at 46,713 square kilometres, as the JACC had advised earlier today, reported the Sydney Morning Herald.

"That hasn't changed," the spokeswoman said in response to questions about the veracity of Abbott's comments.

In a speech in Shanghai, Abbott had said that the search area had been narrowed.

"We are confident that we know the position of the black box flight recorder to within some kilometres," he had said, cautioning, however, that it was not the same as recovering the wreckage.

There was confusion when shortly after Abbott's remarks, Houston said in a statement that the analysis of the signal picked up by the Royal Australian Air Force P-3C Orion aircraft from sonar buoys late yesterday showed that it was unlikely to be related to the aircraft's black box recorder.

"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.

Abbott had said a "series of detections" from the towed pinger aboard the HMAS Ocean Shield had enabled authorities to narrow the search area significantly, but that they were racing against the clock before the black box batteries died.

"We're very confident the signals we're detecting are from the black box from MH370," he had told reporters.

"We're hoping to get as much information as we can before the signal finally expires."

A report on Australia news portal news.com.au explained the seemingly contradictory statements by Abbott and Houston when it said that Abbott was referring to separate signals detected by search teams on Saturday and Tuesday, while Houston was ruling out signals detected yesterday.

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 had 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 had said.

He had spoken shortly after The West Australian aviation editor Geoffrey Thomas had set social media alight by tweeting: "Black boxes of MH370 may have been found. PM to make announcement at 11.45am." – April 11, 2014.

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