

**MH370 search area will be expanded if needed**  
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The search for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 will be expanded to cover another 60,000 sq km in the event that the current search zone does not produce any results.

This was the message from the three governments – Malaysia, Australia and China – involved in the search operations, in an email sent to the next-of-kin of those on board the aircraft, which disappeared on March 8 last year.

According to a statement by the Australian Joint Agency Coordination Centre (JACC) which coordinates the search for MH370, this additional 60,000 sq km would complete the 120,000 sq km search area identified by experts as the potential location of the missing plane.

Ministers from Malaysia, China and Australia are holding a tripartite meeting in Kuala Lumpur today to discuss the next phase of the search.

"Should the aircraft not be found within the current search area, ministers agreed to extend the search by an additional 60,000 square kilometres to bring the search area to 120,000 square kilometres and thereby cover the entire highest probability area identified by expert analysis.

"Ministers recognise the additional search area may take up to a year to complete given the adverse weather conditions in the upcoming winter months.

"Upon completion of the additional 60,000 square kilometres, all high probability search areas would have been covered," the JACC's statement said.

Family members have reportedly welcomed the news as it had been previously feared that search operations will be called off after efforts to look for the plane in the current zone were completed.

Bernama reported yesterday that the current underwater search area for the missing aircraft in the remote area of the Indian Ocean may be largely be completed in May.

The JACC, which oversees the search operation, in a statement indicated that about 60% of the area had been covered so far.

But it said the target had been made assuming that there would be no significant delays involving the vessels, equipment and weather.

Flight MH370 is now the greatest mystery in the history of the aviation industry after it dropped off radar on March 8 last year en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 227 passengers and 12 crew members on board.

The Boeing 777 aircraft has yet to be found, even after an exhaustive search in the southern Indian Ocean, about 2,000km off the coast of western Australia. The aircraft had veered off course and satellite pings indicated its final location as being within the current search zone.

On January 29 this year, the Malaysian Department of Civil Aviation announced that the incident was an accident based on international aviation rules and that all 239 people on board were deemed to have lost their lives. – April 16, 2015.

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