Australian Government

Joint Agency Coordination Centre

MH370 Operational Search Update

7 September 2016

This operational report has been developed to provide regular updates on the progress of the search effort for MH370. Our work will continue to be thorough and methodical, so sometimes weekly progress may seem slow. Please be assured that work is continuing and is aimed at finding MH370 as quickly as possible.

Key developments this week

- *Fugro Equator* arrived in Fremantle this morning this morning for a scheduled port visit and resupply. The vessel is expected to depart for the search area on 8 September 2016.
- *Dong Hai Jiu 101* is conducting trials off Fremantle. Pending the onset of better weather in the search area, the vessel will undertake routine training and maintenance.

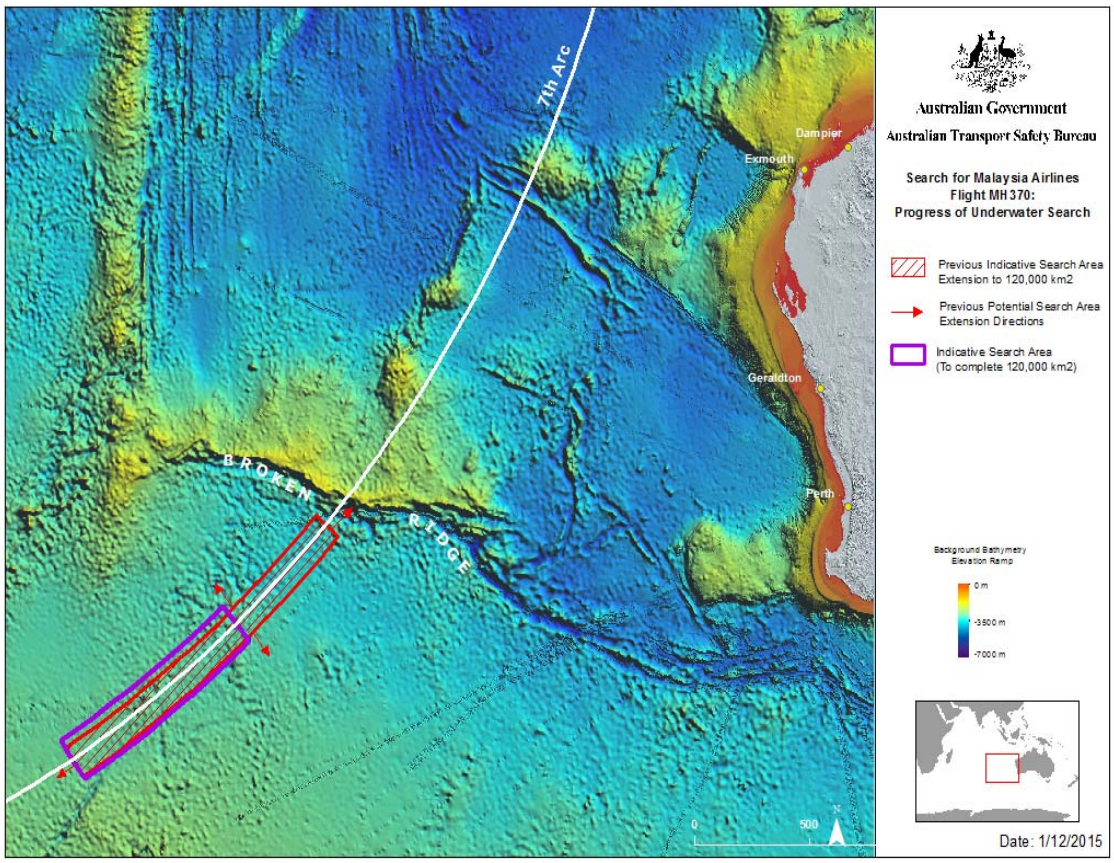
Underwater Search Operations

More than 110,000 square kilometres of the seafloor have been searched so far.

At a meeting of Ministers from Malaysia, Australia and the People's Republic of China held on 22 July 2016, it was agreed that should the aircraft not be located in the current search area, and in the absence of credible new evidence leading to the identification of a specific location of the aircraft, the search would be suspended upon completion of the 120,000 square kilometre search area.

It is expected that searching the entire 120,000 square kilometre search area will be completed by around December 2016.

Ministers went to great lengths to explain that this does not mean the termination of the search. Should credible new information emerge that can be used to identify the specific location of the aircraft, consideration will be given to determining next steps.



Search methods and strategy

The methods and process by which the search is being conducted continue unchanged. Different conditions – both under and above the water – call for different approaches. This fact has always been acknowledged and allowed for in the planning of the search.

The towfish (vehicles equipped with side scan sonar or synthetic aperture sonar, and multibeam echo sounders) are ideal for searching large swathes of the seafloor in a single pass.
The towfish are towed behind the vessels on very long cables and, while they require reasonable conditions to safely launch, once they are in the water they can remain deployed for days at a time.

The sonar data is fed directly to the vessels where it is reviewed and analysed for signs of the aircraft. To ensure nothing of interest is overlooked, the data is subsequently examined by analysts in the Fugro office in Perth and by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) in Canberra. A final independent analysis of the data is then conducted by experts in the United States of America.

Areas of the seafloor that are difficult to search using the towfish, for example areas with irregular terrain, are marked, as are sonar contacts of potential interest. These areas are searched using different equipment. A fact sheet about sonar contacts is available via this link: http://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/2015/mh370-sonar-contacts.aspx.

An Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) is highly manoeuvrable and is used to search areas where the geology of the ocean floor is difficult for effective deep tow operations. The sonar contacts of interest are also further investigated using either a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) or the AUV.

The ROV and AUV deployed from the search vessels must be recovered at the end of each mission. Safe launching and recovery of these vehicles require relatively calm sea conditions. The winter weather has prevented the safe use of this equipment and accordingly some small areas within the search area will not be fully searched until the advent of better weather in the coming months. This approach has always been part of the overall search strategy and operational planning.

The Governments of Malaysia, Australia and the People's Republic of China remain committed to searching the entire 120,000-square kilometre search area thoroughly. Our efforts to date have been careful and comprehensive and we have no reason to think the MH370 wreckage could have been overlooked. That we have found and identified items such as shipwrecks is evidence that the crews, vessels and equipment being used to conduct the search are of the highest quality. We have complete confidence in the capabilities and dedication of everyone involved.

Weather

Poor weather is expected over the coming days, however the absence of vessels in the search area means this will have no effect on search operations.

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