

Mystery jets may have been meteors

Unidentified flying objects sighted over the Longreach area of Queensland last week could have been falling meteors, the Minister for Air, Mr. Howson, said yesterday.

Mr. Howson said the engine noise that had been associated with the sighting could have come from a K.L.M. D.C.8 bound for Manila in the Philippines.

He added that the sightings could not be positively identified.

An Air Force team began investigating the sighting after Mr. C. Lanham, a commercial charter pilot, reported that he had seen at least six swept-wing aircraft in the area on Wednesday.

Mr. Lanham said, "I looked up and at first counted six — my companions

ted six — my companions counted eight."

One of his passengers said, "I know when I see aircraft. They were undoubtedly swept-wing jets — they were definitely not birds."

The sighting started an immediate R.A.A.F. investigation and on Friday an R.A.A.F. Canberra carried a team of experts to Ipswich.

Mr. Howson said that while the sightings could

not be identified positively the R.A.A.F. investigating team did establish that

team did establish that about the time of the sightings a K.L.M. D.C.8 was flying overhead in the Longreach area.

"Similar sightings were reported to the R.A.A.F. last year," he said.

"From information made available at that time by the Mount Stromlo Observatory it appeared likely that the phenomena observed last week could be associated with a major meteor 'shower.'

"These meteor 'showers' are most prevalent in the southern hemisphere in July and August."

Mr. Howson said it was a coincidence that engine noise from the K.L.M. plane was associated with the sighting.

Noise associated with meteor activity, however, was not unusual — explosion-like shock waves sometimes occurred when large meteors penetrated to the earth's surface at supersonic speeds.

The R.A.A.F. received a considerable number of reports of unidentified objects.

After investigation, however, many of them turned out to be weather balloons, high flying aircraft, stars, or meteors.

In recent years, only three or four per cent of these sightings had not been explained on the basis of some natural phenomena,

some natural phenomena, he said.
