Planes diverted as China conducts rare military drill near Australia

Planes flying between Australia and New Zealand have been diverted as China conducts a closely-scrutinised military exercise in nearby waters that may involve live fire.

The rare presence of three Chinese naval ships in the Tasman Sea has put both antipodean countries on alert in recent days, with Australia calling it "unusual".Australian airline Qantas told "temporarily adjusted" the routes of its planes and other carriers have reportedly done the same.

China has said the exercise, which is taking place in international waters, is in accordance with international law.The ships are now reportedly 340 nautical miles east of the New South Wales coast of Australia, although they were said to have come as close as 150 nautical miles from Sydney at one point.

Australia and New Zealand have been closely monitoring the Chinese fleet - a frigate, a cruiser and a supply tanker - since last week, and have dispatched their own ships to observe them.China's foreign ministry confirmed on Friday they were doing naval training and exercises in "distant waters".The exercises were conducted in a safe, standard, and professional manner at all times, in accordance with relevant international laws and practices," spokesman Guo Jiakun said.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the Chinese fleet issued an alert on Friday that they would start conducting exercises which may involve live fire.We continue to work with the Australian government and broader industry to monitor the situation," it added.

Virgin Australia and Air New Zealand have reportedly done the same.