

6.0 CONCLUSION

One of the primary concerns managers have with regards to increasing use in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, is the potential degradation of the natural and social environments of popular sites such as that of Whitehaven Beach. In this study we attempted to assess whether current levels and types of use (inclusive of aircraft and vessel activity) were having an influence upon visitors' use and amenity. Findings suggest that visitors of Whitehaven Beach are not being negatively affected by aircraft activity, visitation by watercraft or other people and their activities during the low use season. The amount of current use of Whitehaven Bay appears to be within visitors' limits of acceptability. Visitors perceived Whitehaven Beach to be a tranquil and quiet site, free from stressful conditions, which provided opportunity for nature experiences and scenic escape. Visitors differed in the types and range of experiences 'benefit packages' they received, yet perceived conditions in similar ways, thus indicating that there are a spectrum of ways to experience Whitehaven Bay. For planners and managers this type of information assists in the development of an experienced based approach to designating types and amounts of use.

Places such as that of Whitehaven Bay vary in what they offer and attract users who differ in what they seek. As reflected in this investigation, natural and social systems are very much interdependent. Managing for multiple use is greatly dependent upon how people think and feel about an environment. Users are the key to understanding these factors and enable planners to provide for an appropriate mix of experiential opportunities whilst protecting the natural values of Marine Park areas. As such, research must continue to monitor social amenity values of Whitehaven Beach in order to continue to ensure that unfettered growth in the tourism industry doesn't degrade the very resources on which it relies. In the meanwhile it appears that Whitehaven Beach is providing the right types of opportunities to satisfy visitors' experiential needs, and this is greatly attributed to the natural beauty and scenic qualities of this unique environment.