

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that, in terms of aircraft activity and noise levels along Whitehaven Beach, a trend inconsistent with that predicted by the definitions of the ROS settings is apparent. The high use zone receiving the lowest levels of use and noise exposure and the moderate and natural use zones receiving the highest levels of use and noise. This appears to be related to planning for the area as aircraft landing zones have been established in settings designated to receive minimal aircraft activity while the ROS settings themselves comprise small spatial areas. However, there also appears to be a problem of compliance with restrictions on access to settings. For example, aircraft takeoffs occurred beyond designated zones as did motorised water sports. For the anthropogenic influences of watercraft and people, the high use setting received the most use, consistent with expectations. However, a gradient in human and watercraft use in line with the definitions of the ROS settings was not apparent between the other settings. Aircraft were found to register the highest decibel levels of any sound source on the beach with peaks ranging from 0 - 40dBA above average natural sound levels. Yet, due to their greater durations of noise, watercraft potentially cause an equivalent or even greater noise impact on recreationists at Whitehaven Beach than aircraft.

It needs to be stressed that the levels of use recorded by this study were based on data collected during a low season of air tours to Whitehaven Beach while one of the loudest aircraft noise sources (low flying military jets) reported to over fly Whitehaven Beach, were not observed during the course of this study.

As growth in the tourism industry continues in Australia, natural quiet is in danger of becoming an increasingly rare resource in protected areas valued by visitors for their natural and scenic qualities. Motorised sources of sound such as air and water craft are responsible for much of the loss in natural quiet in protected areas. Although aircraft activity and sound levels at Whitehaven Beach do not appear to emulate levels experienced in some other protected areas, notably the Grand Canyon, it would be wise to remember that prevention is always better than cure.