

**MX**

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## **Brit visa snub**

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The great Aussie tradition of the British working holiday is under threat.

The UK Government says it is going to cut the number of working-holiday visas issued each year with Australians sure to miss out.

Up to 100,000 Australians aged between 17 and 27 visit Britain on the working-holiday visa each year, often staffing pubs and restaurants across the country.

But under proposals announced in London today, the Government will cap the number of visas handed out.

Other changes will see the scheme expanded to include would-be workers from non-white Commonwealth countries, which could also slash the number of Aussies getting the two-year visa.

"It's too early for me to say you needn't bother coming over to work if you're an Aussie. I think most of the places I eat and drink in in London would be empty without Australian visitors working there," Home Office Minister Angela Eagle said.

"So you're still welcome, but I can't give you figures yet."

Fears of rising unemployment since September 11 are believed to have diminished job prospects for Aussie travellers.

STA Travel spokeswoman Sarah Pellegrini said travellers had reported greater difficulty in finding work in London.

"People with visas are struggling and people without visas have got no hope. It's such a shame - it's been a rite of passage for so many years," she said.

Anger from young travellers could prompt an appeal for Canberra to intervene, she said.

"We'll be talking to our travellers - we'd like to think of ourselves as their advocate and would be prepared to petition the Government as we have done on other issues, such as airport fees."

Australia accepts 75,000 working holidaymakers a year, with more than half from Britain.