

## **Industry urges no limit on UK backpackers**

**By: Stefanie Balogh**

THE backpacking industry is urging Canberra not to retaliate if Britain decides to cap the number of young Australians travelling to the UK on working holidays. The Blair Government has announced its most wide-ranging review of immigration and asylum policies in 60 years including the way the popular holiday working visa scheme operates. About 27,000 Australians aged up to 27 years last year travelled to Britain on the two-year working holiday visas. Stakeholders, including Australian officials, will be invited to comment on the review with a consultation paper on the changes expected to be completed in three months.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said yesterday while it was too early to comment, "we will examine their discussion paper but we argue there should be reciprocity so if their view is that it should be reciprocal, we'll look at reciprocity".

Australia's working holiday maker scheme last year granted more than 39,500 visas to UK residents aged up to 30 for 12-month stays in an industry that generates about \$1.3 billion annually.

Queensland Backpackers Association president Steven Welsh said he would be concerned if Britain decided to limit the number of young Australian backpackers.

"If there was a cap in the UK, that would definitely impact because our Government would more than likely retaliate and then reduce the numbers of UK residents that are allowed over here and it would be very damaging to our industry," he said.

Peter Fuller, manager of public affairs at the British High Commission in Canberra, advised caution, saying "it is far too early to say how the outcome of that review is likely to affect Australian travellers". Mr Fuller said he was aware the British Government was considering allowing visitors to work in their chosen careers, which backpackers cannot currently do.