

130 expats sign up for Canberra perk despite cancellation

By ESTHER WONG

ABOUT 130 expatriate officers have already signed up to return to Britain on the liner Canberra in 1993 and 1994, despite the Government's decision to scrap the luxurious sea cruises in 1994.

Based on a cost of \$70,000 per trip, the 90 officers who have registered ~~to~~ sail in 1993 will cost taxpayers more than \$6 million. The sum does not include the

cost to be incurred by another group of retiring expatriate civil servants from Australia and New Zealand who may also cruise home on another luxury liner, the Sea Princess, next year.

In a letter to the Association for Expatriate Civil Servants (AECS) dated September 7, the Government notified the group of its decision to abolish the sea passage, which has been enjoyed by expatriates for decades.

But Mr David Weeks, a principal assistant secretary for the Civil Service Branch, assured the officers in the letter that the abolition of the perk would not trigger a series of cuts in benefits.

"I can assure you that the withdrawal of sea passages is not part of our plan to run down conditions of service. Rather, it is part of our plan to modernise civil service fringe benefits," Mr Weeks stated.

"One part of this process involves the removal of unnecessary rules and restrictions so that staff can make better use of their benefits," he continued.

However, despite the cancellation of the passage to Britain, Mr Weeks indicated that retiring officers from Australia and New Zealand might enjoy a free cruise home next year.

Expatriate officers who began work with the Government on a

permanent basis before 1984, who have worked in the civil service for 15 years or more and who are 50 years or older are eligible for the free cruise home.

"I understand that a passenger ship may soon start operating between Hongkong and Australia/New Zealand. If so, then officers from Australia/New Zealand would also qualify for the gratia payments," said Mr Weeks.

Noting that the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service had advised that the cancellation of the cruises should be implemented as soon as practicable, the Government decided it should only take effect in 1994.

"We are aware, however, that some officers have already planned their retirement on the basis of taking the Canberra in 1993. We therefore propose to

stop the provision of sea passages with effect from 1994, rather than 1993, as originally proposed," Mr Weeks said in the letter.

The 1993 Canberra cruise will depart from Hongkong on March 4, visiting Thailand, Singapore, the Seychelles off eastern Africa, Durban and Cape Town in South Africa, and other small islands in West Africa before arriving at Southampton in April.

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST
10 SEP 1992