

Dear Mr. Gowers,

I am very concerned about the proposal to extend copyright on recordings to 75 years or even longer. This could have a disastrous effect on the availability of vintage recordings especially in specialist genres - country, jazz, folk, big band, old timey, cajun, etc.

I accept that a case could be made for extending copyright on material that is currently being made available to the public by the copyright owners and their record companies. However there is a wealth of material from the early days of recording right up to the 1950s which the big record companies would not dream of reissuing in a million years. On the other hand there are many small independent labels which specialise in this material and make it available to fans who would not otherwise be able to hear it.

Extending copyright would not only deprive fans of the opportunity to enjoy listening to historic recordings (other than by visiting sound archives) but it would also put a lot of small companies out of business. The artists concerned or their estates would not benefit because if copyright were extended their recordings simply would not be re-released. Conversely they are not harmed by the status quo.

The proposal to extend copyright is being promoted by the big record companies which want to make money out of classic rock'n'roll records by the likes of Cliff Richard and Elvis Presley. Sir Cliff hardly needs the small additional income that this would provide!

Nevertheless I can envisage a compromise. For material that has been kept in the catalogue or reissued regularly, then the owners should be able to retain the copyright for a further period, but this should not apply to recordings which have been dormant for fifty years or more. In other words, if the owners of recordings have shown no interest in reviving them for half a century then those recordings should be up for grabs. No one loses out but a great many gain.

There must be a rigorous definition of what is meant by 'reissued regularly' to stop record companies pressing a very small run of CDs (or issuing a few CD-Rs or making an MP3 download available) purely for the purpose of retaining copyright. The recordings must be widely available through record shops and the worldwide web for a reasonable period, properly publicised and made in sufficient quantities to meet the demand.

I would urge you to reject a blanket extension of the copyright period.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Porter