# Elton John accuses UK government of ‘theft’ over AI copyright law changes



Elton John has voiced strong condemnation against proposed changes to UK copyright laws, asserting that the government is engaging in “theft” by permitting tech firms to use Britain’s rich creative output for training artificial intelligence (AI) models without appropriate compensation. Speaking at a ceremony in New York to celebrate the 55th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, John highlighted the profound implications these proposed relaxations could have on the livelihoods of emerging artists.

The British government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Keir Starmer, aims to position the UK as an AI superpower. As part of this initiative, recent proposals suggest that creators would need to opt out if they wish to protect their works from being used by AI developers. This shift in policy has raised significant concerns among notable figures in the arts, including John, Paul McCartney, and Ed Sheeran, who argue that such changes would further hinder young artists struggling to establish themselves in the competitive creative landscape.

John, addressing the grave threat posed to budding talent, stated, “The danger is for young artists, they haven’t got the resources to keep checking or fight big tech.” His assertion reflects a broader sentiment among artists who fear that weakening copyright protections will unleash a wave of industrial exploitation and diminish the unique value that human creativity brings. “A machine … doesn’t have a soul, doesn’t have a heart, it doesn’t have human feeling,” he continued, emphasising the irreplaceable essence of artistic expression.

The UK’s creative industries have long been a source of national pride, thriving across diverse sectors such as theatre, music, and film. However, the potential implications of the government’s proposal could jeopardise that very foundation. Critics argue that the new framework will immeasurably complicate the future for artists, particularly those just starting their careers. With the landscape evolving rapidly amidst technological advancement, many fear that the balance between progress and protection is in peril.

The government has indicated that it is consulting on these measures, pledging not to endorse any changes unless satisfied that they will benefit creators. Such assurances, however, have not quelled the outcry from the creative community. Over 400 artists and industry executives, including John, signed an open letter appealing to Starmer for stronger protections. They called for more transparency surrounding AI usage that would compel developers to disclose the copyrighted materials used in training their algorithms, aiming to prevent what many consider the “mass theft” of creative works.

In a symbolic gesture of protest, John and more than a thousand UK musicians released a silent album titled *Is This What We Want?*. This album consists of recordings from empty studios, a poignant representation of the potential stifling of artistic expression and autonomy. Profits from this unique project are directed toward the charity Help Musicians, underscoring the collective resolve to safeguard the creative landscape.

Adding to the urgency of the situation, various campaigns, including "Make it Fair," have emerged to galvanise artists against what they regard as a fundamental threat to their rights. The proposed “rights reservation” system, which would require creators to actively opt out to safeguard their work, has been met with fierce resistance. Many argue that such a system shifts the burden unjustly onto artists, particularly emerging ones who may lack the resources or awareness to navigate these complexities.

Ultimately, John and his contemporaries are imploring the government to reconsider its approach to copyright law and artificial intelligence, asserting that the UK's leadership in the creative sector could be irreparably compromised by these policies. The words of artists resonate with urgency amidst an evolving digital landscape, where the safeguarding of creativity must keep pace with technological advancements.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans-2025-05-18/)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d)
3. Paragraph 3: [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/elton-john-paul-mccartney-keir-starmer-musicians-kate-bush-b1214046.html)
5. Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d), [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/dc80620c1c226a816048b87fb30309c4)
6. Paragraph 6: [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168), [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/dc80620c1c226a816048b87fb30309c4)
7. Paragraph 7: [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/22/elton-john-calls-for-uk-copyright-rules-rethink-to-protect-creators-from-ai), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d)
8. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168)
9. Paragraph 9: [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/22/elton-john-calls-for-uk-copyright-rules-rethink-to-protect-creators-from-ai), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168)
10. Paragraph 10: [[1]](https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/elton-john-paul-mccartney-keir-starmer-musicians-kate-bush-b1214046.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://arizonadigitalfreepress.com/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans-2025-05-18/> - Elton John has criticized the UK government's proposal to relax copyright laws, allowing AI developers to train models on creative content without ensuring proper compensation to original creators. He, along with other prominent artists, argues that this move could harm young artists' livelihoods and the UK's creative industry. The government states it is consulting on measures and will not proceed unless satisfied they work for creators.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/22/elton-john-calls-for-uk-copyright-rules-rethink-to-protect-creators-from-ai> - Elton John has called on the UK government to reconsider proposals that would relax copyright rules, potentially allowing AI firms to use online material, including creative works, without permission. He emphasizes that such changes could undermine the UK's leadership in the creative sector and urges for a system where creators can opt-in to protect their work from unauthorized AI use.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d> - Over 400 UK musicians, artists, and media executives, including Sir Paul McCartney, Elton John, and Dua Lipa, have signed a letter urging Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to support stronger copyright protections against unauthorized AI usage. They advocate for an amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill, requiring AI developers to disclose specific copyrighted materials used to train their models, aiming to prevent the mass theft of creative works by AI firms.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/dc80620c1c226a816048b87fb30309c4> - A silent album titled 'Is This What We Want?' has been released by over 1,000 British musicians, including Kate Bush and Elton John, to protest proposed changes to UK AI laws that could allow tech firms to use copyrighted material to train AI models without creators' consent. The album's 12 tracks are recordings of empty studios, symbolizing the potential loss of creative control. Profits from the album will support the charity Help Musicians.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168> - Thousands of British musicians, artists, authors, and journalists have protested against government proposals that would allow tech companies to use their work to train AI models. The consultation suggests a 'rights reservation' system where each creator must opt out to prevent their work from being used. The 'Make it Fair' campaign highlights the dangers of this proposal, with over 1,000 musicians releasing a silent album titled 'Is This What We Want?' to demonstrate the risk to the music industry.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/elton-john-paul-mccartney-keir-starmer-musicians-kate-bush-b1214046.html> - Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has expressed a desire for 'creatives to thrive' following backlash from artists like Sir Elton John and Sir Paul McCartney against proposed changes to copyright law and artificial intelligence. Musicians warn that government proposals to change UK copyright law to allow AI models to be more easily trained on copyrighted material could damage the creative industries and lead to artists being replaced by technology in the long term.