UK rejects music copyright extension

By Kate Holton

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LONDON (Reuters) - The British government rejected a plea to extend copyright laws for sound recordings to beyond 50 years on Tuesday, prompting the music industry to accuse it of not supporting musicians and artists.

The music industry had won support from opposition politicians and a parliamentary committee in its bid for a copyright extension that would allow veterans such as Cliff Richard and Paul McCartney to carry on receiving royalties in later life.

The government would have had to push the European Commission for a change in the law but said such a move did not seem appropriate as it would not benefit the majority of performers and could lead to increased costs.

"The UK is a world-beating source of great music, so it is frustrating that on the issue of copyright term the government has shown scant respect for British artists and the UK recording industry," John Kennedy, head of the IFPI body which represents the international recording industry, said in a statement.

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Under current rules, performers can earn royalties for 50 years from the end of the year when a sound recording was made. In comparison, novelists, playwrights and composers enjoy copyright protection for their life and 70 years afterwards.

Cliff Richard, whose first hit "Move It!" from 1958 is approaching the cut-off point, has led the campaign to highlight the issue, with support from the likes of McCartney,
Robbie Williams and The Who's Roger Daltrey.

The parliamentary committee for culture, media and sport said in May it would support an extension, given the importance of the creative industries in Britain.

The copyright protection for performers in the United States is 95 years from release and in Australia it is 70 years. The industry had called on the British government to lobby the European Commission to extend the term to at least 70 years.

Geoff Taylor, chief executive of the BPI, which represents the British recorded music industry, said the government had failed its test to show support for British music.

"We will continue to put forward the strong case for fair copyright in Europe," he said. "It is profoundly disappointing that we are forced to do so without the backing of the British government."