

MR RIGHT

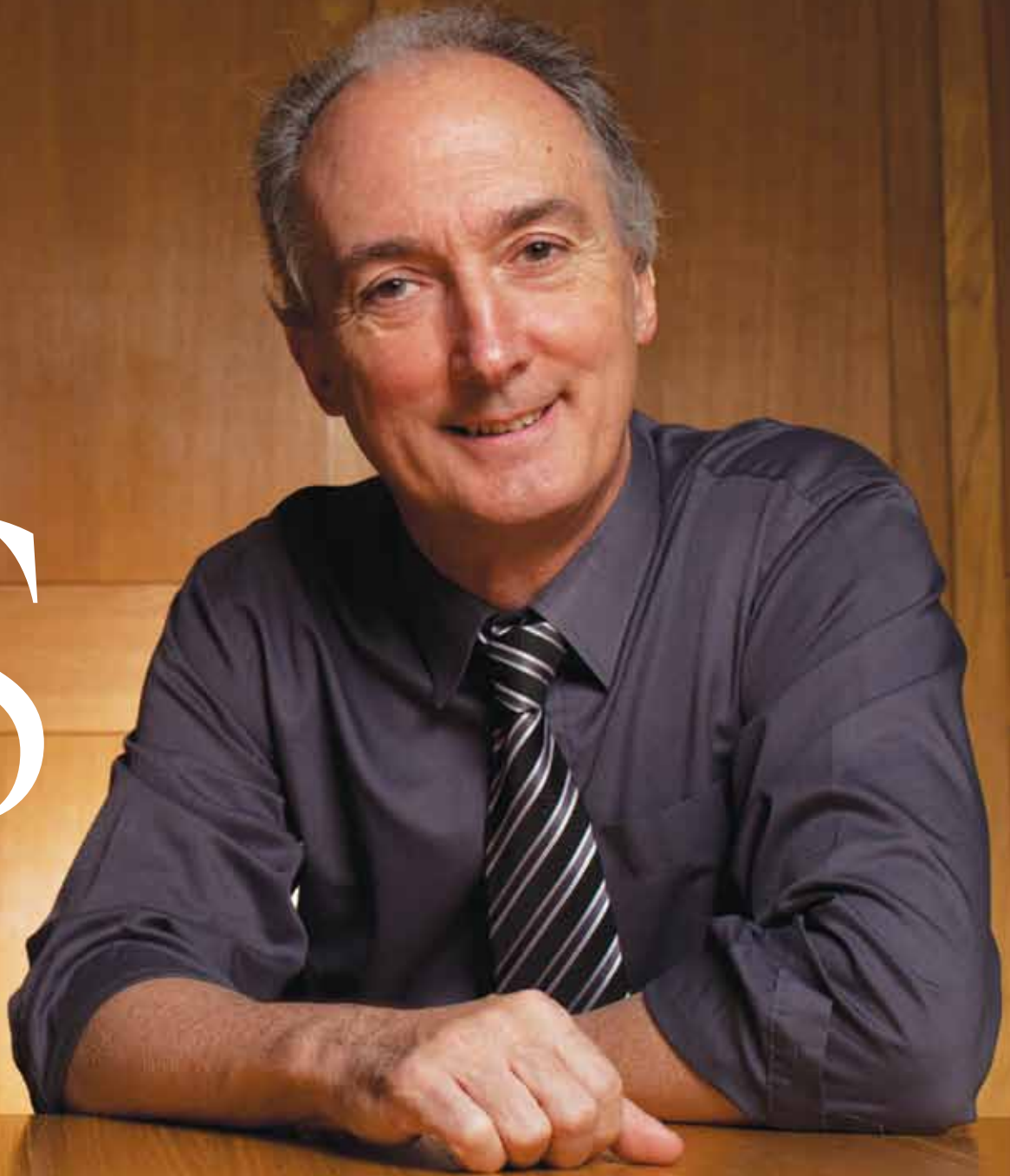
As the first-ever intellectual property adviser to the Prime Minister, Mike Weatherley has laid the foundations for protecting the creative industries in the internet age but, he says, there is much more to be done

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SPOTLIGHT

**MIKE
WEATHERLEY
MP**

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Mike Weatherley considers himself an average person from an ordinary background; he is the son of a community nurse and an accountant, and is himself a chartered management accountant. But from those relatively humble beginnings he has risen to become the man who has shaped the course of history for intellectual property (IP) rights in the UK – and beyond.

Appointed in 2013 as the first IP adviser to the Prime Minister in parliamentary history, he has written three solid reports on IP rights – with a fourth on the way. These are already influencing policy in such far flung places as Hong Kong and the US, and they inform the debate into how creators' works are protected in the UK.



Weatherley says he was first attracted to politics at university after being irritated by a 'very militant left-wing student union' and the price of a cheese roll in the canteen, but worked in the music and film industries before entering parliament as Conservative MP for Hove and Portslade.

His early working life means he is naturally passionate about IP rights, which is why he was so dismayed to learn, when he first joined parliament, just how far backwards the country had travelled in terms of attitudes to IP.

'Back then, IP rights were something I took for granted,' says Weatherley. 'I thought that people understood the importance of protecting creators' works.

'But it became clear to me that a lot of people didn't agree with that. They thought that by restricting access to someone's works or inventions you were actually hindering the economy.'

At the beginning of his term, Weatherley says the general consensus was that the internet was too big, too vast, and that people didn't understand it and felt nothing could be done about it.

So he has taken it upon himself to try to educate both legislators and MPs. But it has been an uphill battle, with few MPs – let alone the ordinary man or woman in the street – understanding the meaning of IP.



Weatherley says: 'Quite frankly, if I said I used to work in intellectual property they had no idea what that was. If I said copyright, they got it.'

The UK was trying to tackle the issues before he got the bit between his teeth, he says, but even the Hargreaves report – an independent study by Professor Ian Hargreaves examining IP and the opportunities in digital – was, to some extent, abandoning a lot of IP rights.

'I felt he was giving these rights away unilaterally without gaining any concessions back – just as a kind of half-hearted sop to those who were complaining about IP rights and trying to keep them quiet. At least, that was my impression.'

After three years of helping to 'put the brakes on' the erosion of IP rights by launching two competitions – Rock the House and Film the House – at the Houses of Parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron rewarded Weatherley by appointing him as parliament's first adviser on IP.

But life at Westminster hasn't all been plain sailing. With the appointment came suspicion and resentment; some in government considered the role to be in competition with the IP minister, but Weatherley just doesn't see it that way – particularly considering there have been eight IP ministers in as many years.

'When the PM created this role, I saw it as a way to

THE RIGHT TRACK

Mike Weatherley's steps to beating piracy:

1. **Education** – win the public's hearts and minds
2. **Carrot** – industry has to change some of its models. The Spofifys of this world are a good example of changing to a rented library system. People no longer want to buy CDs, they want to rent a library of tracks for less than the full price of an album each time
3. **Stick** – used as a last resort. The money should be taken away from illegal websites, some should be closed down and ISPs blocked



cut through all the various departments and challenge things,' he says.

His first three reports in 2014 focused on search engines, tackling advertising revenues (currently being followed up by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO)), and education. His fourth – expected to be published in mid-February – will make recommendations on safe harbours and internet service providers (ISPs).

Sadly, the Conservative party has already ruled out the creation of an IP tsar, despite Weatherley believing the role is crucial if the IP industry is to be protected.

'We've lost the argument with the average person in the street; they don't think downloading a song for free is a bad thing,' he says. 'We need to win back the hearts and minds of the public.'

'There are a lot of initiatives out there already. The film and music industry do some; IPO do some; but nothing is coordinated and it's just scratching the surface.'

'What I want to do is put all those scratches together and start making a gouge, if you like, to get right into the minds of people so they say: "I understand why it's wrong" and I want teenagers to say to other teenagers, "You know what, you're destroying the industry by doing that. Don't do it. You could go and buy it for 50p".'

'I genuinely think we can win [the IP fight] with the right will behind it, but we do need an IP director-general

to be introduced by government; we do need the IPO to take these [issues in the reports] on board and we do need international cooperation.'

Weatherley is a staunch supporter of trading standards' work in the IP arena, describing the profession as 'one of the great organisations of the country'. He even suggested to *The Review* that the IPO's responsibility for intelligence be given over to the profession on an official basis. And, if more national coordination were to be investigated and introduced within trading standards, it is Weatherley's firm belief that any such national body would become a world leader.

'Some of your regional officers are fantastic,' says

Weatherley. 'They really know their stuff and they're really enthusiastic. But they're kind of isolated in their own little area. Having a beefed-up central unit that uses some of this excellence from all these areas may be the best way forward – and that's something that needs to be discussed.'

He adds: 'Trading standards is an undervalued jewel in society. If I had my way, government would instruct local authorities to ring-fence a certain proportion of funding for trading standards. I think it's that important.'

'If I've had one failure as an MP, it's that I haven't been able to persuade the government to do this.'

After a fruitful five years in post – and a successful battle against oesophageal cancer, which very nearly killed him – Weatherley has decided not to stand for re-election this year, but to go back into business, working in the music and film industry once again.

Despite his own disappointment at not achieving more for trading standards' cause, Weatherley says: 'I think we have genuinely changed the IP direction of this country, and I think we're in a good place to take it forward. We haven't solved anything yet, but we're in the right place. When we have this discussion in three years' time, I think a lot of my recommendations will have been implemented. We'll be on the right road and we'll be winning the battle against piracy.'

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