



£55k and a hamster - Ofcom threats to US firm trigger hilarious responses

Description

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Ofcom

The UK's [Online Safety Act](#) (OSA) is widely recognised to be [more about keeping UK people from finding out things](#) the UK government wants to keep from them, than any idea of actual online safety. Just like Keir Starmer's [new social media ban on under-16s](#) That will [make kids less safe](#) but might make it [harder for them to learn about Israel's horrific crimes](#) (if they're technologically inept). But the overreach of the UK government and its "independent" regulator, ofcom, thinking they can control what organisations in other countries do has led to some unintentional hilarity.

£55k and a hamster

Ofcom is the UK regulator of broadcasters and the internet, along with the telecoms and postal industry. It has the power to impose fines for breaches by UK companies and is the UK's enforcer for the OSA and similar legislation. Or what passes for it, when it comes to firms that don't operate in the UK. But it has either failed to recognise that, or assumes that it can get away with bluster.

But that doesn't pan out in practice. Ofcom has imposed around £5m in fines, but has [managed to collect only £55,000](#). Oh, and a hamster.

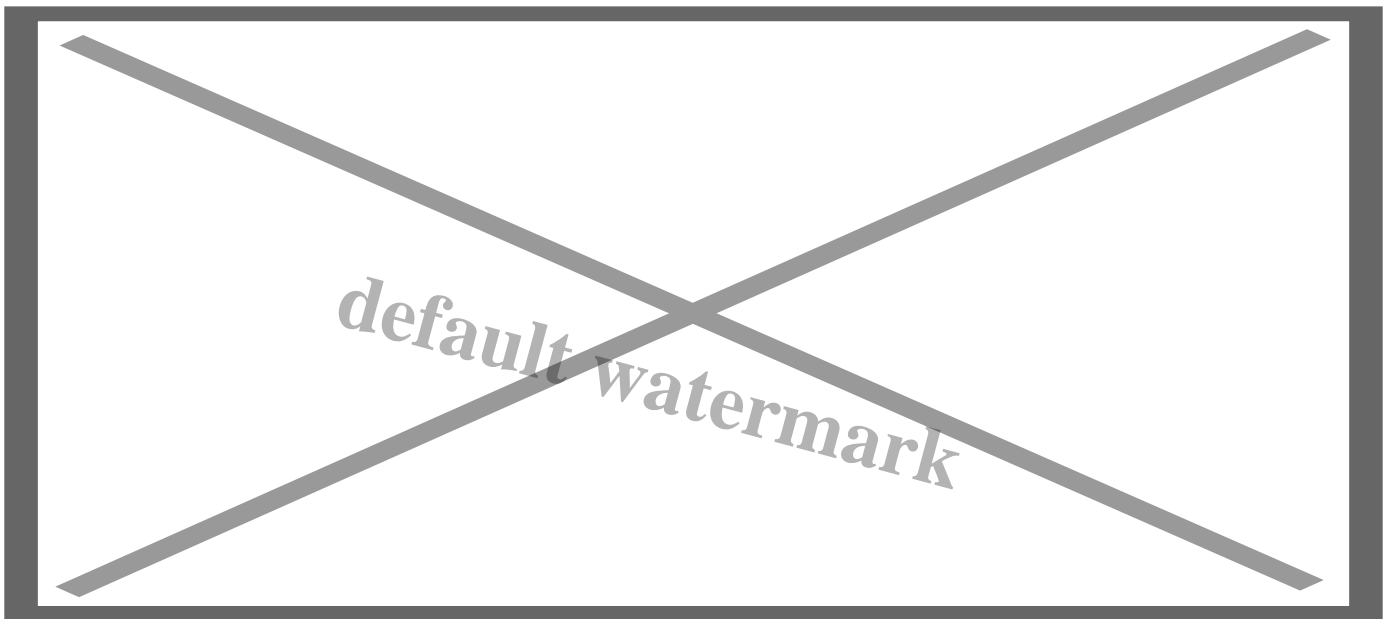
Ofcom - Business Disruption Measures

Ofcom ordered US imageboard 4chan to take action to stop UK users from accessing its platform. It then agreed that the action 4chan had taken - blocking UK IP addresses - was adequate and only required monitoring. But after political pressure - hence "independent" regulator rather than "independent regulator" - it then changed its mind. As a result, it started

firing threats at 4chan, including to obtain a "Business Disruption Measures" order from the UK government for all other firms to stop supplying 4chan with any services or materials.

It then ultimately imposed fines on the US organisation.

4chan, which has no servers in the UK and is entirely based in the US, was not impressed. Its lawyers, rather than simply bin or ignore Ofcom, responded that Ofcom's stream of documents had no force in the US and would make good hamster-bedding:



Maintaining the theme, when Ofcom tried in March 2026 to impose a "giant fine" on 4chan, the attorneys replied "by emailing an image of a giant hamster:

The UK's censorship agency, Ofcom, issued 4chan with a giant fine today.

We responded to Ofcom with a giant hamster today. pic.twitter.com/u6faBpeauA

" Preston Byrne (@prestonjbyrne) [March 19, 2026](#)

Lawyer Preston Byrne said that he was not "mocking British power", because his legal point was deadly serious:

The hamsters are not mocking British power, or some kind of cheap joke. These hamster e-mails are, in many respects, the most serious and consequential legal communications I have ever sent, in nearly two decades of law practice.

But he might as well have been. Ofcom, though, did not get the point and continued issuing threats and fines. This led Byrne to tell LBC on behalf of his clients that Starmer's government, especially appalling technology secretary Liz Kendall, don't understand what the internet is or how it works:

This was surely the inevitable outcome of the government's attempt to regulate the internet. The Online Safety Act wasn't a multi-lateral agreement between nations, just local legislation. How was it ever going to work?

Labour doesn't understand the internet, tech giant!

Martin Kimber (@MrMKimber) [June 17, 2026](#)

Byrne added that the UK government is setting up Ofcom to take the blame for the predictable failure of its attempts to control the world's access to information:

No lies detected

Also did my friends at Ofcom a solid here. Parliament is setting them up to fail by blaming them for the Online Safety Act's problems, which are grounded in the law's design, not Ofcom's execution of that design. <https://t.co/Gh6klUUu8m>

Preston Byrne (@prestonbyrne) [June 17, 2026](#)

Kendall, meanwhile, made clear that she has no clue about the hamster and has never understood the hamster:

They're laughing at us, aren't they?
Yep.

Ofcom has collected £55,000 and a cartoon picture of a hamster from their total of £5m in fines levied.

Technology Secretary Liz Kendall accepts that the media regulator isn't doing enough. <pic.twitter.com/lslBLgh0rQ>

LBC (@LBC) [June 16, 2026](#)

Did you trip and fall onto a VPN?

Kendall's stubborn stupidity and Ofcom's continued refusal to accept reality forced Byrne to be very blunt. And very funny. He wrote to Ofcom about its continued attempts to fine 4chan and even to demand it kick out all users globally to meet Ofcom's hissy-fit. And its misrepresentation of its own attempts to get around 4chan's attempts to block UK-based IP addresses.

He wrote (emphases added):

Ofcom,

By way of reminder, my client was voluntarily geoblocking the United Kingdom. Your agency circumvented that block; my client responded by closing the available circumvention route. Your agency circumvented it again, my client blocked harder to make it more difficult to post on the site, although any VPN user can still see if they dress up as American web traffic. You then asked my client to change its TOS; my client refused.

Your agency now writes to my client asking (a) for **payment of its unenforceable fine, (b) to terminate all logged in user sessions, globally, and (c) to change its TOS. My client refuses and will not be cooperating.**

If Ofcom identifies the account IDs it used to circumvent the geoblock, my client will ban those accounts. **My client will not force a global logout of every user, worldwide, to help Ofcom terminate its own sessions -sessions Ofcom or its NGO partners created by deliberately circumventing the geoblock with a VPN.**

My client will also not be paying any fine for constitutionally protected speech. **Your threats to collect it are toothless and unenforceable in the only jurisdiction that matters for that question: the United Kingdom where my client and its servers sit. If Ofcom disagrees, it is welcome to shed the cloak of immunity and show up in an American court as a plaintiff. If not, stop over-claiming jurisdiction. You do not have, in countries where you have no authority.**

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Ofcom says it **“continues to assess”** whether to deploy Business Disruption Measures. This firm has repeatedly advised Ofcom to **“go nuclear”** and get an access restriction order. We sincerely hope this will give your agency the political cover it needs to terminate this enforcement action and move on to other things.

Until, of course, everyone figures out that an access restriction order is circumventable via VPN too, which will raise uncomfortable questions about what, exactly, Parliament was trying to accomplish here and how little Parliament knew about the functioning of the Internet when it enacted the Online Safety Act.

As a final note, I note Ofcom, in its letter, **says it “[does] not accept your client’s assertions that “Ofcom deliberately circumvented the geoblock.” How else would one circumvent a geoblock? By accident? Did you trip and fall onto a VPN?**

My client reserves all rights and waives none.

Byrne & Storm

IT specialist Fehr Mahrouf nailed the main reason the Starmer regime is overreaching so badly **“attempts to stop people finding out about Israel’s genocide and UK citizens’ resistance to it. Mahrouf [described](#) Byrne’s response as:**

the funniest legal letter I have ever read 🤔 the UK is trying to lock down the entire internet to end opposition to the Palestinian holocaust, and it’s not going well.

Quite. And may it go far worse. If Andy Burnham wants to show the UK he is going to be any different from Starmer when he takes over in Number 10, he could do no better than repeal the ridiculous OSA and the social media ban.

Read Preston Byrne's full accounts of the "Battle of Ofcom" [here](#)

Featured image [via Ofcom / the Canary](#)

By [Skwawkbox](#)

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