Summary overview of progress made towards the delivery of the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy

The EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy\(^1\) (hereinafter: "Action Plan"), adopted on 27/4/2017\(^2\), comprises four priority areas and fifteen concrete actions. These respond to the Nature Directives\(^2\) Fitness Check\(^3\) findings and address the main shortcomings revealed by this evidence-based evaluation. The aim of the Action Plan is to rapidly improve practical implementation of the Nature Directives, to accelerate progress towards the EU 2020 goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services and to improve the Directives' coherence with broader socio-economic objectives.

The Action Plan covers the period 2017-2019, so that the Commission can report on their delivery before the end of its current mandate in 2019. It includes four priority areas with 15 concrete actions.

This note provides a summary overview of the progress made towards the delivery of the actions, under each category. Annex I provides a timeline for the implementation of those actions involving the development of guidance documents, where the consultation phases with Member States and stakeholders are highlighted.

\(^1\) COM(2017) 198 final,  
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/action_plan/communication_en.pdf and  
SWD(2017) 139 final,  


\(^3\) The Commission findings of the Fitness Check are presented in the Staff Working Document published on 16 December 2016 - SWD(2016) 472 final -  
Most of the information in this note is also contained in relevant sections of the broader info note on "Progress towards the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020". The difference is in that the present note keeps with the scope and structure of the Action plan for nature, people and the economy, in order to facilitate overview of progress specifically under this plan. In some cases, it also provides more detail.

**Priority A "Improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socioeconomic objectives": Actions 1 - 3**

Under Action 1 of the Action Plan, the Commission, in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders has committed to:

- Update the interpretative guidance document on provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive on the conservation and management of Natura 2000 (by 2017)
  - NADEG was consulted on a final draft in November 2017 and the adoption is expected by May 2018
- Update the methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive (by 2018) on the permitting requirements for plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites, also addressing issues relevant for the Projects of Common Interest (PCI) under the Trans-European Transport and Energy Networks (TEN-T/TEN-E)
  - A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support in relation to the task. Member States and stakeholders will be consulted in that context – see Annex I.
  - The final draft is expected by the end of 2018.
- Update the guidance on species protection rules under the Habitats Directive (by 2018)
  - A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support in relation to the task. Member States and stakeholders will be consulted in that context – see Annex I.
  - The final draft is expected by the end of 2018.
- Update the "Key concepts document on the period of reproduction and prenuptial migration of huntable bird Species in the EU" (by 2019)
  - Work has started with support from a technical and scientific support contract. Member States and stakeholders will be consulted in that context – see Annex I.
  - The final draft is expected by 2019.
- Develop a new guidance on hydropower and Natura 2000 (by 2017)
  - The adoption is expected by April 2018 – see Annex I.
- Develop a new guidance on electricity transmission facilities and Natura 2000 (by 2017)
  - The adoption is expected by April 2018 – see Annex I.
- Update guidance on wind energy and Natura 2000 (by 2019)
  - A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support in relation to the task. Member States and stakeholders will be consulted in that context – see Annex I.
  - The adoption is expected by 2019.
- Develop new guidance on Natura 2000 and fisheries under the common fisheries policy rules (by 2018)
  - The document on Article 11 of the Common Fisheries Policy procedures is expected to be adopted by April 2018 – see Annex I.
Develop guidance and a set of practical tools to support the integration of ecosystems and their services into planning and decision-making processes at local, regional, national and EU levels (by 2018)

- An outline concept for the guidance has been presented and discussed in the meeting of the GIIR WG on 31/01/2018.
- Discussion in CGBN on 1/03/2018.
- Consultation with MSs and stakeholders – see Annex I.
- Adoption foreseen by August 2018.

Provide an online ‘Frequently Asked Questions and Answers’ on Natura 2000 (2017)


In addition, under Action 2, Member States can make use of the EIR Peer to Peer mechanism to spread best practice and transfer know-how between national and regional authorities for issues related to the permitting requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives for Natura 2000 and species protection rules. The contract signed in relation to the update of the methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and 6(4) and on species protection will also support the setting up of this mechanism – see Annex I.

Under Action 3 of the Action Plan:

- The Natura 2000 Viewer has a new look and new functions.
- A first analysis of problems concerning quality and coherence of the data reported under the Natura 2000 data-flow and the 6-yearly progress reports is being undertaken by the ETC-BD. In the October 2017 meeting of the reporting group, the concept for the analysis was presented. The Expert Group on Reporting under the Nature Directives will meet again on 9 March 2018, when first results will be presented and discussed with the group.
- The concept of "Favourable Reference Values” was further defined in the revised reporting guidelines for the reporting cycle 2013-2018. A contract supporting work on FRVs is nearing its end and results will be available from May 2018 onwards (detailed recommendations and worked out examples).

Priority B "Building political ownership and strengthening compliance": Actions 4 - 7

Under Action 4, Member States will complete the designation of Natura 2000 at land and at sea and establish and implement the necessary conservation objectives and measures for all Natura 2000 sites.

Action 4 refers to the following actions to be taken by the Commission to support Member State delivering on these actions, such as: a) Strengthen enforcement action of relevant legal obligations (i.e. Articles 4(1), 4(4) and 6(1) of the Habitats Directive and Articles 4(1) and 4(2) of the Birds Directive); b) Facilitating the exchange of best practices among Member States and the development of common goals to ensure coherence of conservation objectives and measures at biogeographical level (see also Actions 6 and 13 of the Action Plan); c) Holding dedicated bilateral meetings with competent authorities (see also Action 5 of the Action Plan); d) Support Member States to improve synergies while implementing the Nature Directives, the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Nitrates Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Floods Directive (FD), and the Invasive Alien Species Regulation, through building on the existing guidance; e) facilitate the
development of fisheries measures under the common fisheries policy (CFP) for marine Natura 2000 sites, to meet the conservation objectives of habitat types and species protected under the Nature Directives and in line with the objectives of the MSFD.

a) Strengthen enforcement action

The Commission has opened EU-Pilots for 23 Member States, asking them to solve remaining gaps in their network of SCIs and/or marine SPAs. Legal action cannot be excluded in cases of clear evidence of lack of action and legal proceedings are on-going for four Member States.

The Commission is also continuing to closely follow-up the implementation of the legal obligations to designate SCIs as SACs and establish the necessary conservation objectives and measures, in light of the substantial delays in fulfilling these obligations. In 2015 the Commission launched legal procedures against eight Member States with clear implementation deficits and Reasoned Opinions were issued in 2016 against three of these Member States, in light of the insufficient progress achieved. One of these three cases has recently been advanced to the next phase (saisine to CJEU). At the same time the Commission is also following up the EU-Pilots open for six Member States. Moreover, in October 2016 the Commission sent EU Pilots requests to 12 more Member States, for which the deadline to comply with the above obligations has more recently expired. The Commission is now analysing the replies provided by the Member States and will follow up as appropriate.

b) The Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process (action 6):

The second Natura 2000 Seminar for the Mediterranean region took place in Limassol, Cyprus, from 14 to 16 November 2017. The Seminar provided an opportunity for Natura 2000 experts from 9 Member States across the Mediterranean region to discuss joint actions and areas of cooperation to optimise the contribution of Natura 2000 to achieving the favourable conservation status in the Mediterranean region. The seminar was hosted by Terra Cypria, the Cyprus conservation foundation, with the support of the Cyprus Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment. Discussions at the seminar focussed on four thematic clusters: 1. Assessment and sustainable development of ecosystems; 2. Conservation objectives, monitoring and evaluation; 3. Effective governance models; 4. Addressing threats and pressure on Mediterranean habitats and species. All seminar documents, including the Seminar Report are available on the Natura 2000 Communication Platform. The second Natura 2000 Seminar for the Continental, Pannonian, Steppic and Black Sea regions is planned for June or September 2018. The general organisation and thematic focus of this seminar will be discussed at a meeting of the respective Steering Committee on 28 February 2018 in Brussels. Place and exact dates of the seminar are still to be determined. More details will be made available on the Natura 2000 Communication Platform.

Under the marine biogeographical process a workshop on fisheries management measures in Natura 2000 sites in the Mediterranean Sea took place from 10th to 12th October 2017, in Zadar, Croatia. The final report, along with presentations and other workshop materials, are available on the Natura 2000

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6 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/index_en.htm
Communication platform\(^7\). The second Marine Natura 2000 Seminar is planned for the second half of 2018, along with a possible regional workshop; details will be consulted with the Marine Expert Group. Several thematic follow-up and networking events have been organised under the process in different biogeographical regions. Detailed information on the process, including all seminars and thematic follow-up events is available on the Natura 2000 Communication Platform\(^8\). Minutes of the Steering Committee meetings are available on CIRCA BC: https://circabc.europa.eu/w/browse/b9886a98-1fe2-40f1-a759-053c62748d6c.

c) Holding dedicated bilateral meetings (action 5)

Under Action 5 of the Action Plan and in the framework of the EIR structured dialogue, the Commission and Member States will hold dedicated bilateral meetings, involving national and regional authorities competent for implementation of the Nature Directives. The aim is to discuss structural implementation problems, identify key actions to improve implementation and agree on common implementation roadmaps, with milestones and deliverables. Back to back meetings with private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders will also be organized.

The first bilateral meetings were organized by BG (21-22 November 2017) and IT (12-13 February 2018). Next meetings are planned with SI (12-13 March 2018), CY (25-26 April 2018), FI (14-15 May 2018), SK (31 May – 1 June), NL (3-4 July 2018), Lithuania (16-17 October 2018), SE (November 2018) and possibly LV.

A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support in relation to the organization of these meetings. This covers the preparation of Country Profiles as background documents of the meetings. Member States will be consulted on these reports before their finalization.

d) Improving synergies with WFD, the Nitrate Directive, MSFD, FD, and the Invasive Alien Species Regulation (action 4)

A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support in relation to improving synergies with WFD, MSFD, FD, ND and IAS Regulation. This will cover:

1. The promotion of existing guidance\(^9\) on the links between the Nature Directives and the WFD, MSFD and the FD through a workshop to be held around May 2019 – see Annex I.


\(^8\)http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/index_en.htm

2. the elaboration of a FAQ note presenting how the Nitrates Directive relates to the Nature Directives and how synergies in implementation can be improved among these instruments, keeping the focus on the Nature Directives’ implementation (1st draft by December 2018 and final draft by June 2019) – see Annex I.

3. the elaboration of a FAQ note presenting how the IAS Regulation relates to the Nature Directives and how synergies in implementation can be improved among these instruments, keeping the focus on the Nature Directives’ implementation (1st draft by March 2019 and final draft by August 2019) – see Annex I.

Under Action 7, the Commission in collaboration with Member States and stakeholders will develop and implement the following action plans:

- a new EU multispecies action plan covering forty-four bat species (by 2017)
  - The action plan is expected to be finalized by April.

- a new EU multi-species action plan for eight lowland breeding waders (*Haematopus ostralegus, Vanellus vanellus, Calidris alpina, Calidris pugnax, Gallinago gallinago, Numenius arquata, Limosa limosa* and *Tringa totanus*) (by 2018)
  - The action plan is expected to be finalized by May 2018 – see Annex I.

- two new EU species action plans for marine birds (*Puffinus yelkouan* and *Hydrobates monteiroi*) (by 2018)
  - The action plan is expected to be finalized by May 2018 – see Annex I.

- six EU/international action plans for the following species: *Gypaetus barbatus, Aegypius monachus, Pelecanus crispus, Streptopelia turtur, Melanitta fusca* and *Oxyura leucocephala* (by 2018)
  - The action plan is expected to be finalized by May 2018 – see Annex I.

- a minimum of two plans for the most threatened habitat types, having regard to the recent European Red List of Habitats10 (by 2019)
  - A contract has been signed for technical and scientific support. The 1st Action Plan is expected to be prepared by October 2018 and the 2nd by March 2019.
  - A workshop for the promotion/dissemination of the two Action Plans will also be organized – see Annex I.

Under Action 7 of the Action Plan, the EU Platform on the Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores has examined potential funding sources for good practices. A report and new case studies are available on the Platform website.11 The work plan includes further analysis of case studies to identify transferable good practice as well as support to regional workshops and the plenary meeting. The 4th annual meeting of the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores took place in Brussels on 1 June 2017. Items on the agenda included the case studies’ analysis and reflections on joint work with regional platforms. A press release from the meeting including a statement on large carnivore management in Romania was agreed. More information is available at:


online. A Regional Workshop of the Platform took place on 8-10 June 2017 in Bucharest, Romania, organised by FACE and WWF and their national members (General Association of Romanian Hunters & Anglers-AGVPS and WWF Romania). The participants to the workshop shared good practices in large carnivore management and communication between different stakeholders in Romania and discussed the current situation of large carnivore management. More information is available online. With the support of 2 Pilot Projects of the European Parliament, the Commission will start organising regional platforms on large carnivores, at the level of the biogeo graphical regions, involving authorities and stakeholders during the course of 2018.

**Priority C "Strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies with EU funding instruments": Actions 8 - 12**

Under Action 8, the Commission is currently working on updating the format for the PAFs and several consultations have taken place to discuss with Member States a new draft format (last one on 26/01/2018) which is now close to finalisation. Action 8 of the Action Plan also envisages supporting Member States in their update of the PAF during the course of 2018 through dedicated seminars. This is planned for by the Commission with the assistance of an external contractor. Such support should be provided as of September 2018 with the organisation of the first seminars.

The Commission is also working towards continuation of mainstreaming of Natura 2000 and biodiversity in all major EU funds. We envisage eligibility of funding of nature protection from all relevant EU funds and recognition of PAFs as strategic planning tools for Natura 2000 and GI in the upcoming proposals for sectoral regulations. The Communication on the future CAP already refers to the PAFs as one of the key tools in relation to environmental policies and legislation.

Moreover, in relation to LIFE earmarking, funding for Nature and Biodiversity has been increased by 10% with the adoption of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2018/93 of 16 November 2017 on the increase of the percentage of the budgetary resources allocated to projects supported by way of action grants under the sub-programme for Environment dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity according to Article 9(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 ( published in the Official Journal on 18/01/2018).

The Commission closely cooperated with the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in the preparation of the special Court report ‘More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full


13 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/events_sub_workshop_Bucharest_Romania.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/events_sub_workshop_Bucharest_Romania.htm)

The Court made a number of recommendations addressed to the Member States and to the Commission, including improvement of analysis of funding needs, update of the PAFs, increased effort to ensure consistency between the priorities and objectives set out in the PAFs and the programming documents, better guidance to the Member States on these issues, and development of cross cutting indicators across EU funds in relation to Natura 2000. The Commission has accepted these recommendations and is working with the Member States to address them in the context of the implementation of the Action Plan.

The Commission, in cooperation with an external contractor, has finalised the study ‘Integration approach to financing of biodiversity: evaluation of results and analysis of options for the future’. The study analyses effectiveness of financing nature and biodiversity in the EU predominantly by integration into major EU funds and investigates some options for the future. The Commission is exploring the potential of private land conservation in the framework of two LIFE Preparatory Projects.

On action 8c, see also progress on NCFF and the B@B platform as reported in the general background document.

In relation to the implementation of Action 9, the Commission is encouraging a more effective use of EAFRD for Natura 2000 protection including through modifications of rural development programmes. To this end, the European Network for Rural Development organised a workshop with DG ENV and DG AGRI on 28 September 2017 on "Natura 2000: making an effective use of the support possibilities under the Rural Development Policy". The topic was also discussed at the Rural Development Committee on 4 October 2017. In this context, the workshops on biodiversity proofing the CAP as reported in the general background document are also relevant. On 1st Pillar greening, the Commission is also encouraging Member States to extend the designation of their Permanent Grassland as Environmentally Sensitive Permanent Grassland in designated Natura 2000 sites and the topic was discussed in the NADEG meeting of 07 November 2017.

As foreseen by the EU green infrastructure strategy, under Action 12 of the Action Plan, the Commission prepared throughout 2017 a review of progress in implementing that strategy. The draft review report is now submitted to formal inter-service consultation. Fact sheets summarizing the implementation of the green infrastructure strategy in the 28 EU Member States have also been elaborated in this context with the help of a contract, submitted to MS for review, and are now published on the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE) and publicly available.

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16 Integration approach to EU biodiversity financing – final report
   Integration approach to EU biodiversity financing – summary
   Integration approach to EU biodiversity financing – case studies of innovative financing


18 https://biodiversity.europa.eu/countries/gi
The Commission is working on the preparation of the guidance announced in Action 12 of the Action Plan, providing a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU-level Green Infrastructure. A draft outline of the guidance on ‘a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU-level green and blue infrastructure’ was circulated and discussed at the meeting of the EU working group on green infrastructure and restoration on the 1st of February 2018 in Brussels, and the CGBN and the WG GI&R will be kept associated to further revisions of the draft. Following the EU technical workshop on knowledge base and spatial and technical data for GI and restoration which took place on 24-25 October 2016 in Brussels, a report has been prepared, led by the EEA, the JRC and DG ENV, on ‘Informing strategic green infrastructure and restoration planning through mapping and assessment methods based on spatial and technical data’. A presentation of the envisaged content of the report was made at the meeting of the EU working group on green infrastructure and restoration on the 1st of February 2018 in Brussels, and a draft of this report is to be circulated in early Spring 2018.

See also general background document on Nature Based Solutions projects under H2020.

**Priority D "Better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities": Actions 13 - 15**

Under Action 14, a series of case studies showing links between Natura 2000 and cultural sites have now been finalised and are available [online](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/links_natural_cultural_heritage_en.htm). The document highlights practices and options for an integrated management of natural and cultural assets and associated socio-economic benefits. A leaflet presenting the publication will be available soon. Furthermore, work has started for evaluating spatial overlaps between N2000 and cultural sites, and for identifying elements of success for synergies and opportunities for related socio-economic benefits. Furthermore, in the context of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, 2018 will see activities and initiatives all around Europe to celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage, which aims to encourage Europeans to understand and reflect on the place that cultural heritage occupies in our lives, and to protect its unique value. The official launch of the [European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/how-to-apply/index_en.htm) took place at the European Culture Forum on 7-8 December. From December 2017, a newsletter is sent out every two months. Nature will be prominent part of the cultural heritage celebrations and several joint actions are envisaged under priority 4 of the Action Plan.

**Natura 2000 Award**

Under Action 14 of the Action Plan, the Natura 2000 Award[^21] is dedicated to rewarding excellence in the management and promotion of the network and to raising awareness about Natura 2000 and its benefits to European citizens. The award has moved to a biennial cycle. For the Natura 2000 award 2018 edition, 75 applications from 26 Member States were received.

Any entity involved in activities related to Natura 2000 can apply - local and national authorities, businesses, land owners, NGOs, educational institutions and individuals from all 28 EU Member States. There are five award categories: Conservation, Communication, Socio-economic benefits, Reconciling interests /perceptions, Cross-border cooperation and networking. In addition, an “EU Citizens’ Award” will go to the application receiving the highest number of votes from EU citizens in the course of March and April 2018. We count on your support to spread the information and promote the vote so that as many as possible people visit the site and get informed about success stories from Natura 2000 management. As usual DG ENV will carry out a social media campaign and CGBN members are encourage to share and promote the vote.

The winners will be announced by the Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella at a high level ceremony on 17 May 2018, a few days before the European Natura 2000 day.

**Natura 2000 Day**

Under Action 14 of the Action Plan, the Commission, together with the Council Presidency, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions established the 21st of May as the EU Natura 2000 Day. In 2017 over 200 local celebrations and networking activities took place across the EU, involving local public and stakeholders. The activities were truly wide ranging – from festivals and photography exhibitions to guided walks and cycling tours, open days and numerous activities for children to discover nature. A number of Commission officials also participated in these activities.

For the celebration of the Natura 2000 day in 2018 we warmly invite the MS authorities and stakeholders to organise activities involving the general public. We are working on the creation of a dedicated webpage where to gather information of all activities across the EU. Once this webpage is ready (beginning of March), we will send it to you to communicate on activities you will organise in your countries.

As 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage we invite the MS and stakeholders, when planning events for the celebration of the EU Natura 2000 day, to consider organising them also where both natural and cultural heritage are present, thereby promoting synergies and highlighting the role of natural/cultural heritage for our social cohesion, employment and economic growth.

**Green Week 2018**

The next edition of EU Green Week will be under the slogan Green Cities for a Greener Future and will take place on 21-25 May 2018 (starting with the EU Natura 2000 day). It will explore ways in which the EU is helping cities to become better places to live and work. Showcasing policy developments on air quality, noise, nature, waste and water management, it will promote participatory approaches to urban development, networking schemes, and tools for sharing best practices, engaging local authorities and citizens, and encouraging them to share their vision of a sustainable future.

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23 [https://www.eugreenweek.eu/](https://www.eugreenweek.eu/)
EU Green Week 2018 will include events across Europe, a high level conference in Brussels from 22-24 May 2018, an Opening ceremony in Utrecht on 21st of May and Closing ceremony in Madrid on 25th of May to take place in the Member States.
Annex I – Timeline for the development / update of guidance documents under the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy

*N.B. timing for consultations is indicative!*

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<th>ACTION</th>
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The update of the Wind Energy Guidance is one of the 6 Tasks of the 2-year (Dec.2017 – Dec.2019) Project “Reviewing and mitigating the impacts of renewable energy developments on habitats and species protected under Birds and Habitats Directives”. The other 5 Tasks concern: 1) Evaluation of possible shortcomings in Member States during the decision–making, planning and authorisation of renewable energy projects with a potential impact on habitats and species protected under the nature legislation and suggestion of possible ways to address them. 2) Review of the potential impacts of other renewable energy sources (solar, geothermal and ocean energy) on habitats and species protected under nature legislation and presentation of effective mitigation strategies, 3) Development of a toolkit with options for the criteria and the methodology necessary for the preparation of wildlife sensitivity maps, 4) Review of the impacts of bioenergy developments, 5) Organisation of events to all MS for the promotion of the outcomes of the contract. (The Nature Authorities of the Member States will soon be contacted by the Contractor responsible for this project for consultation on the several Tasks).
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<td>Workshop (back to back with NADEG)</td>
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<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Finalization</td>
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