



40 × 40
40% URBAN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE COVER BY 2040

IT STACKS UP.

Building a Sustainable Greenlife Economy by 2040.



ONE NATIONAL AMBITION. PLACE-BASED PATHWAYS.

40
×
40

Australia is getting hotter. Our cities and towns are growing and changing. At the same time, the living infrastructure that cools neighbourhoods, supports health, creates habitat and helps manage water is under increasing pressure. [1]

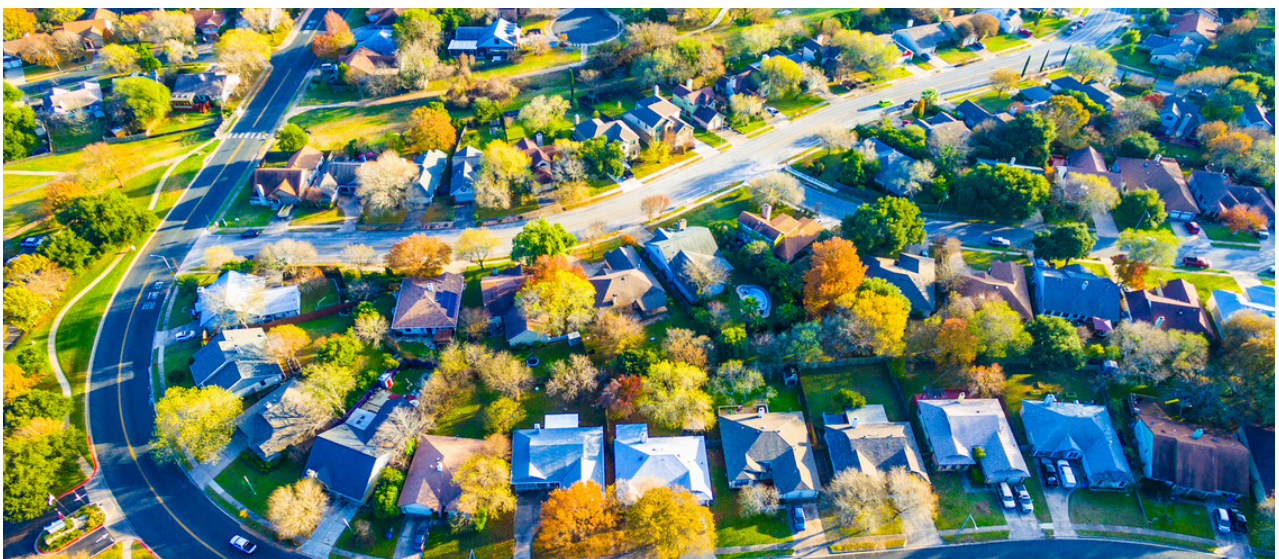
40 by 40 sets a clear national ambition: 40% urban green infrastructure cover by 2040.

It is not a prescription for exactly 40% in every street, suburb or city. But every patch of green counts.

Australia's urban places differ in climate, density, ecology, land use and existing green cover. The ambition is national. The pathways to get there must respond to place.

That means protecting the green infrastructure we already have and growing more where it can deliver the greatest benefit.

DIFFERENT PLACES. DIFFERENT PATHWAYS. ONE NATIONAL AMBITION.



THE COST OF HOTTER CITIES IS ALREADY HERE.

Heatwaves are Australia's deadliest natural hazard. [1]

And their impact extends well beyond temperature.

Heat affects health, productivity, household energy use, infrastructure and the everyday experience of our streets and neighbourhoods.

\$1.78B

Modelled health and economic cost of heat stress on very hot days in 2030 across Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney under a business-as-usual scenario. [2].

\$1.4B

TODAY RISING TO \$6.8 BILLION

Estimated annual heatwave cost to Western Sydney today, rising to more than \$6.8 billion by the 2070s without sufficient adaptation. [3]

In Western Sydney, health impacts are projected to account for more than half of that future cost. [3]

Yes, heat is an environmental issue.

It is also a health, productivity and infrastructure issue.





ONE INVESTMENT, MANY STACKED BENEFITS

Urban green infrastructure can deliver multiple public benefits from the same investment.



18°C+

Reduction in mean radiant temperature experienced by pedestrians beneath street trees in Melbourne compared with exposed streets in recent comparative research. [4]
Mean radiant temperature, not ambient air temperature.

\$19.3M

Estimated annual reduction in cardiovascular hospital costs per 100,000 people within the modelled Australian study population when local tree canopy increased from below 10% to at least 30%. [5]

\$1.47 : \$1

Mean societal benefit-cost ratio achieved in the strongest proactive street-tree investment scenario in the 2026 Greater Adelaide study. [6]
By comparison, a low-investment, minimal replanting scenario generated just \$0.61 : \$1 invested. Investing more delivers substantially better value across:

How and where we green matters as much as how much.

We know green infrastructure works.

WHAT WE DON'T YET HAVE IS THE NATIONAL MACHINERY TO DELIVER IT AT SCALE.

Across Australia, governments, councils, industry and communities are already acting. But the system remains fragmented.

We don't yet measure Urban Green Infrastructure (UGI) consistently

National datasets already measure important elements of tree and vegetation cover, but Australia does not have one nationally agreed UGI framework that consistently tracks type, condition, gain, loss, distribution and community need. [8]

Funding is fragmented

Councils carry significant delivery and asset management responsibilities, yet urban

greening funding is often delivered through individual grant programs and projects. Government reviews have recognised the need for longer-term funding to help councils plan, deliver and manage urban greening. [9] [10]

We can grow green infrastructure in one place while losing it in another

Private land makes a major contribution to urban canopy, while redevelopment can significantly reduce the space available for large trees and vegetation. [11]

Our rules can still design green out

Utilities, engineering and infrastructure requirements, road design, development outcomes and fragmented responsibilities can limit the space available for high-performing UGI.

Green infrastructure is still too often treated as amenity

Rather than long-term essential infrastructure to be planned, funded, protected, maintained and measured.



40 BY 40 PROVIDES THE AMBITION

SIX NATIONAL REFORMS PROVIDE THE PATHWAY

SIX MOVES TO MAKE 40 BY 40 POSSIBLE



1 SET

Set a national ambition.

Endorse 40 by 40: 40% UGI cover by 2040, delivered by place-based pathways.



2 VALUE

Treat UGI as essential infrastructure

Create the national policy framework to plan, fund and manage it accordingly.



3 INVEST

Back local delivery

Create a \$1 billion national financial assistance program for - and matched 1:1 by - local government.



4 PROTECT

Stop losing what we already have

Set minimum UGI outcomes for new development and strengthen retention and replacement.



5 MEASURE

Know where we are - and where we are going

Establish nationally consistent UGI mapping and monitoring.



6 UNLOCK

Remove the barriers to delivery

Modernise the standards and systems that unintentionally prevent good UGI outcomes.

**ONE AMBITION. SIX LEVERS.
ONE DELIVERY SYSTEM.**

 1 SET **2 VALUE**

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE SHOULD BE TREATED LIKE ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

40 by 40 provides a national direction: 40% Urban Green Infrastructure cover by 2040.

But a target alone will not change what gets planned, funded or delivered. Urban green infrastructure needs to be managed with the seriousness we apply to the other systems our communities depend on.

If UGI is infrastructure, we:

-  **PLAN IT**
alongside housing, transport, water and community infrastructure.
-  **FUND IT**
for delivery, establishment and long-term maintenance.
-  **PROTECT IT**
as an asset with enduring public value.
-  **MEASURE IT**
against clear outcomes.
-  **DESIGN FOR IT**
through planning, engineering and development standards.

Australia's National Urban Policy already recognises that parks, bushland and canopy help mitigate urban heat, encourage active transport, support biodiversity and create social and economic benefits. [12]

Australia's National Adaptation Plan calls for adaptation that is targeted, evidence-based, collaborative and place-based. [9]

40 by 40 can turn those directions into a practical national urban-greening framework.

THE ASKS

- Endorse 40 by 40 as a national UGI ambition: 40% UGI cover by 2040.
- Develop a National Urban Green Infrastructure Strategy establishing a pathway for UGI to be recognised, planned and managed as essential infrastructure.

3 INVEST

Councils know their communities.

THEY NEED THE MEANS TO ACT AT SCALE

Local governments are critical to delivering UGI.

They manage streets, parks and public spaces. They influence development outcomes. They maintain local assets. And they are often closest to the communities experiencing heat and declining green cover.

Australia's National Adaptation Plan explicitly recognises the role of local government in managing climate risks to public assets and service delivery and helping communities build adaptive capacity. [9]

Many councils are already leading. A long-term Commonwealth funding program would enable them to go further.

\$1B

OVER FIVE YEARS

A dedicated Local Government Urban Greening Financial Assistance Program could accelerate:

- urban cooling and shade
- tree and vegetation establishment
- green streets and public spaces
- soil, water and necessary establishment infrastructure
- long-term maintenance
- survival rates
- local UGI strategies
- delivery plans
- investment in communities experiencing high heat and low green cover



**NATIONAL INVESTMENT.
LOCAL DELIVERY.**

3 INVEST

**\$1 BILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDING.
MATCHED 1:1 WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT.**

THE \$1 BILLION LOCAL GREENLIFE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

THE ASK

Establish a \$1 billion Local Greenlife Infrastructure Fund (LGIF) to help councils deliver the green infrastructure their communities need.

**\$1 BILLION FEDERAL +
\$1 BILLION LOCAL**

**= UP TO \$2 BILLION
in greenlife infrastructure**

The Australian Government should establish a \$1 billion matched-funding program for local government, providing the scale and certainty councils need to plan and deliver multi-year urban greening programs.

Through a competitive grants process, Federal funding would match local government investment 1:1, supporting street trees, urban canopy expansion, green corridors, water-sensitive urban design and other forms of greenlife infrastructure.

Green infrastructure is essential civic infrastructure. Like roads, drainage and other assets, it requires long-term planning, investment and ongoing management.

A dedicated national fund would enable councils to move beyond fragmented, project-by-project greening and deliver at the scale required to reduce urban heat, strengthen climate resilience, improve community wellbeing and protect the long-term liveability of Australian cities and towns.

ROADS TO RECOVERY

A proven approach to investing in local infrastructure.

The Australian Government already invests directly in local infrastructure at national scale through the Roads to Recovery Program. The LGIF would apply a similar principle to greenlife infrastructure: a dedicated Federal funding stream that enables councils to invest in essential local assets over the longer term.

4 PROTECT

WE CANNOT PLANT OUR WAY OUT OF CANOPY LOSS.

New planting matters. So does protecting the living infrastructure that already exists.

55%

of tree cover in residential suburbs was on private land in the Brisbane study. [11]

30%

LESS
CANOPY

on average on residential parcels developed since the early 1990s in the same Brisbane study. [11]

Research across six Melbourne councils has also found that private-tree protections can be weakened by exemptions, inconsistent enforcement and inadequate penalties. [13]

The implication is simple:
Public investment in new green infrastructure cannot do all the work while established green infrastructure continues to disappear.

PROTECT.
PROVIDE.
REPLACE.
GROW.

THE ASK

AVOID LOSS

Retain mature trees and significant vegetation wherever practicable.

PROVIDE SPACE

Secure deep soil, soil volume, permeability and room for vegetation to mature.

DELIVER OUTCOMES

Set appropriate canopy, shade and UGI outcomes for different development types.

REPLACE LOSS

Require meaningful replacement where removal cannot be avoided.

USE OFFSETS LAST

Avoid allowing offsite offsets to become an easy substitute for onsite retention and provision.

4 PROTECT

NEW DEVELOPMENT SHOULD HELP DELIVER 40 BY 40.

Urban growth and urban greening do not have to be opposing objectives. But good outcomes require us to move beyond simple planting counts.

A tree without room to grow is not future canopy.

A sapling does not immediately replace the benefits of a mature tree.

Landscaping cannot compensate for the loss of all deep soil.

A next generation of UGI development requirements could focus on measurable outcomes such as:

- deep-soil provision
- adequate soil volume
- future canopy
- shade
- permeability
- water-sensitive design
- biodiversity
- retention and replacement

Australia can create an approach that works for our climates, cities and planning systems.

AUSTRALIA WOULD NOT BE ACTING ALONE

The European Union's Nature Restoration Regulation requires no net loss of total national urban green space and urban tree-canopy cover by 2030, subject to specified provisions, followed by increasing trends after 2030. [14]

In England, subject to exemptions, development is required to deliver at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, using a statutory biodiversity metric, with significant gains secured for at least 30 years. [15]

NEWER SCHOOLS. LESS SPACE. LESS NATURAL SHADE.

University of Canberra's Schoolyard Greenprint aerial analysis found secondary schools built between 2011 and 2026 in its sample were nearly half the size of schools built around 60 years earlier. Researchers also found natural shade was disappearing and the sampled schools averaged one tree for every 56 students. [16]

As our cities become denser, green infrastructure needs to be designed in - not squeezed out.

WE CANNOT MANAGE WHAT WE DO NOT MEASURE.

Australia is not starting from zero.

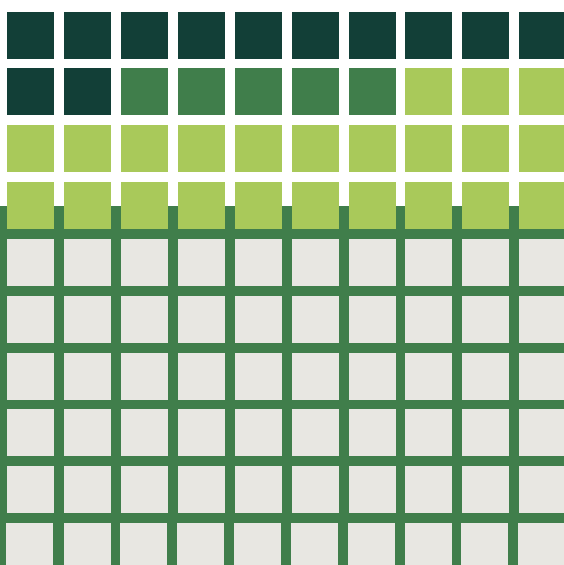
Geoscape's National Trees dataset maps tree coverage and height across Australia, including higher-resolution coverage in predefined urban areas. [8]

Digital Earth Australia Fractional Cover provides a long-term national record of photosynthetic vegetation, non-photosynthetic vegetation and bare ground. [8]

These are valuable foundations.

What Australia does not yet have is one agreed national UGI measurement and monitoring system.

A nationally agreed program could bring existing datasets, new measurement and consistent definitions together into a shared evidence base.



HOW MUCH DO WE HAVE?

Canopy and other UGI extent.

WHAT TYPE IS IT?

Trees, ground-level vegetation and built-form greening.

WHERE IS IT?

Public land, private land, streets, parks, development and structures.

ARE WE GAINING OR LOSING?

Gross gain and gross loss over time.

WHO NEEDS IT MOST?

Heat exposure, low green cover and social vulnerability.

IS IT WORKING?

Condition, survival and performance.

THE ASK

Establish an ongoing National Urban Green Infrastructure Mapping and Monitoring Program.

PROPOSED INVESTMENT: \$50 MILLION OVER THREE YEARS

6 UNLOCK

WE ARE STILL DESIGNING GREEN OUT OF OUR CITIES.

The opportunity to deliver UGI is often constrained before a project begins.

- Road layouts
- Utilities
- Clearance requirements
- Engineering standards
- Limited soil space
- Fragmented approvals
- Competing responsibilities

Individually, these requirements may have legitimate purposes.

Collectively, they can make it harder to create the living infrastructure our cities increasingly need. And the opportunity is not only on the ground.

Cities are three-dimensional

- streets and verges
- parks and public land
- private gardens
- development sites
- rooftops
- walls and structures
- water-sensitive landscapes



THE ASK

Establish a National UGI Barrier Removal Program to:

- modernise relevant engineering and design standards
- review utility offsets and clearance guidance
- embed adequate growing space into street design
- develop approved solutions for constrained sites
- improve coordination between councils, utilities and associated agencies
- enable integrated ground-plane greening and structure-based greening

PROPOSED INVESTMENT:
\$50 MILLION OVER THREE YEARS

**CUT RED TAPE
WHERE IT
BLOCKS
GOOD UGI.**

**STRENGTHEN
STANDARDS
WHERE THEY
CAN DELIVER
BETTER
OUTCOMES.**

40 BY 40 BUILDS ON THE DIRECTION AUSTRALIA IS ALREADY TAKING.

1 National urban policy

Australia's National Urban Policy recognises that green infrastructure including parks, bushland and canopy contributes to urban cooling, active transport, biodiversity and social and economic outcomes. [12]

2 National adaption plan

Australia's first National Adaptation Plan establishes a framework for nationally significant physical climate risk and calls for adaptation that is targeted, evidence-based, collaborative and place-based. [9]

3 Industry momentum

Australia's National Urban Green Infrastructure Round Table brought together 12 peak bodies representing more than 23,900 professional members and 500,000 Australian jobs across planning, design, engineering, horticulture, arboriculture, parks and green-infrastructure supply. [17]

4 Global momentum

The European Union and England have already introduced measurable requirements for urban nature and biodiversity outcomes. [14][15]



40 BY 40 DOES NOT START FROM ZERO.

It connects existing policy direction, local action, industry capability and emerging international practice through a shared national ambition.

SIX REFORMS. ONE NATIONAL DELIVERY FRAMEWORK.

-  **1 SET**
40 BY 40
Endorse a national ambition of 40% UGI cover by 2040, delivered through place-based pathways.
-  **2 VALUE**
National UGI strategy
Create the pathway to treating UGI as essential infrastructure.
-  **3 INVEST**
Local government UGI matched funding assistance program
Back place-based delivery at scale.
▶ \$1B / 5 years
-  **4 PROTECT**
Minimum UGI outcomes + stronger retention
Protect existing assets and ensure new development contributes.
-  **5 MEASURE**
National UGI mapping + monitoring
Create a nationally consistent evidence and accountability framework.
▶ \$50M / 3 years
-  **6 UNLOCK**
National barrier removal program
Modernise the systems that constrain delivery.
▶ \$50M / 3 years

40 BY 40 IS THE AMBITION. THIS IS THE DELIVERY SYSTEM.

Investment amounts are Greenlife Industry Australia policy proposals. Detailed program design and cost modelling should accompany implementation.

AUSTRALIA HAS THE KNOWLEDGE. IT HAS THE INDUSTRY. IT HAS LOCAL LEADERSHIP.

What is missing is the national framework to connect those strengths and act at scale.

-  Councils are already delivering.
-  Industry is ready to play its part.
-  Australian research is demonstrating the value.
-  National policy increasingly recognises the need for resilient, liveable urban places. [6][9][12][17]

40 BY 40. IT STACKS UP. NOW LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sebastian Pfautsch | President - Australasian Green Infrastructure Network (AGIN);
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EVIDENCE NOTES

ABOUT THE 40 BY 40 TARGET

40 by 40 is a proposed national policy ambition of Greenlife Industry Australia.

This document does not present 40% as a universal scientific threshold or suggest that every local government area, suburb, street or land-use type should independently achieve exactly 40%.

Local pathways should reflect climate, existing green cover, urban form, ecology, community need and the practical capacity to establish and sustain UGI.

A nationally consistent methodology for defining and measuring UGI cover should be established as part of the national mapping and monitoring framework.

WHAT COUNTS AS UGI?

For advocacy purposes, this document uses urban green infrastructure to describe living green infrastructure within urban places, including tree canopy and other planted or vegetated systems across public land, private land and the built environment.

The final national framework should formally determine:

- what land is included in the denominator
- which vegetation and UGI types count
- how canopy and other green cover are differentiated
- how green roofs and vertical greening are treated
- how public and private land are reported
- how quality, condition and survival are measured
- how gross gains and losses are reported
- how metropolitan and regional urban areas are defined

IMPORTANT EVIDENCE DISTINCTIONS

The 18°C+ result relates to mean radiant temperature, not ambient air temperature.[4]

The \$19.3M per 100,000 people result is a modelled cardiovascular disease hospital-cost saving within an Australian longitudinal study population when local canopy increased from below 10% to at least 30%; it should not be represented as a guaranteed national saving.[5]

The 55%+ private-land and 30% less-canopy results come from a Brisbane residential-suburb study and are evidence of the importance of private land, not national canopy percentages.[11]

The DCCEE \$1.78B analysis models green and blue infrastructure scenarios across Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.[2]

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- [1]** Bureau of Meteorology, & CSIRO (2024). State of the Climate 2024: Australia's changing climate. Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. Reports increasing extreme heat and notes that extreme heat has caused more deaths in Australia than any other natural hazard.
- [2]** Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2026). Urban Ecosystem Services Project. Project led by Marsden Jacob Associates. The Urban Ecosystem Pilot Accounts model approximately \$1.78 billion in health and economic heat-stress costs on extreme-heat days in 2030 across Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney under the business-as-usual scenario. Under the modelled high green-and-blue-infrastructure scenario, costs fall to approximately \$320 million.
- [3]** Committee for Sydney & Scyne Advisory (2024). Burning Money: The Rising Costs of Heatwaves to Western Sydney. Models aggregate annual heatwave costs increasing from approximately \$1.4 billion today to more than \$6.8 billion by the 2070s without mitigating action.
- [4]** Rahman, M.A., Cheung, P.K., Pattnaik, N., Lam, T.W.L., Dade, M.C., Jim, C.Y., Pauleit, S. & Livesley, S.J. (2026). The Microclimate and Human Thermal Comfort Impacts of Increased Vegetation Complexity in Urban Streets and Greenspaces. Urban Sustainability, Springer, pp. 113-139. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-95-5487-4_6. The research found that Melbourne street trees reduced mean radiant temperature experienced by pedestrians by more than 18°C compared with open streets.
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- [8]** Geoscape Australia (2025-26). National Trees, Version 1.8; and Geoscience Australia / Digital Earth Australia. DEA Fractional Cover (Landsat). These datasets provide advanced national mapping of physical tree canopy and fractional vegetation cover over time. However, they operate independently and lack integration with qualitative or socio-demographic metrics. Consequently, they highlight that while Australia can track physical green cover change, it still lacks a unified national framework to measure UGI condition, distribution equity, and community need.

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[9] Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2025). National Adaptation Plan. Establishes the Australian Government framework for nationally significant physical climate risks and principles for targeted, evidence-based, collaborative and place-based adaptation. The Plan recognises that local councils manage critical frontline execution and asset responsibilities.



[10] NSW Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2023). Greening our City Grant Program: Evaluation Management Response. NSW Government. The evaluation identifies long-term grant funding as important to building councils' capacity to plan, deliver and maintain urban canopy and greening.



[11] Daniel, C., Morrison, T.H. & Phinn, S. (2016). The governance of private residential land in cities and spatial effects on tree cover. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 62, 79-89. DOI: 10.1016/j.envsci.2016.01.015. Reports 55.2% of residential tree cover in Brisbane occurring over private land and approximately 30% less canopy on low-density residential parcels developed since the early 1990s.



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[16] University of Canberra (2026). The Schoolyard Greenprint: A practical guide to creating adolescent-friendly outdoor spaces. Health Research Institute. Provides aerial analysis and practical data mapping the decline of outdoor spatial footprints and natural tree canopy in modern Australian secondary schools.



[17] National Urban Green Infrastructure Round Table (2025). Urban Green Infrastructure: A Critical Asset for Liveable Cities, Joint Statement, 3 March 2025. Twelve peak bodies reported collective representation of more than 23,900 professional members and over 500,000 Australian jobs across relevant sectors.



40%

URBAN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE COVER BY 2040.

Greenlife
INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA

40 × 40

40% URBAN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE COVER BY 2040

IT STACKS UP.

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