

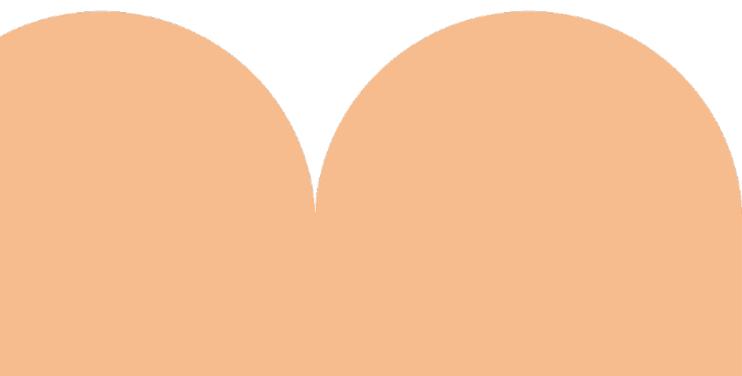


Landcare Plan for Victoria Literature Review

February 2023

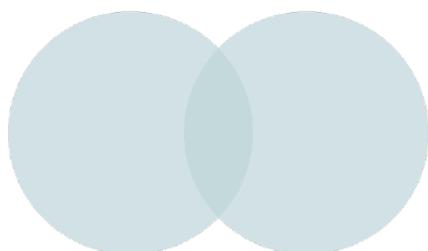


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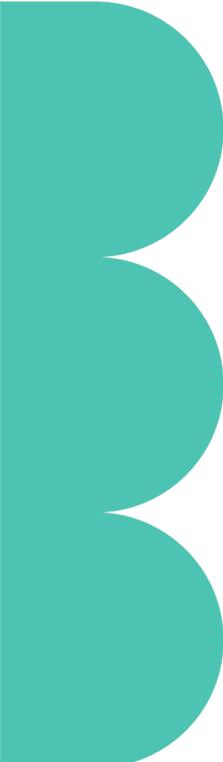
Landcare Plan for Victoria Literature Review

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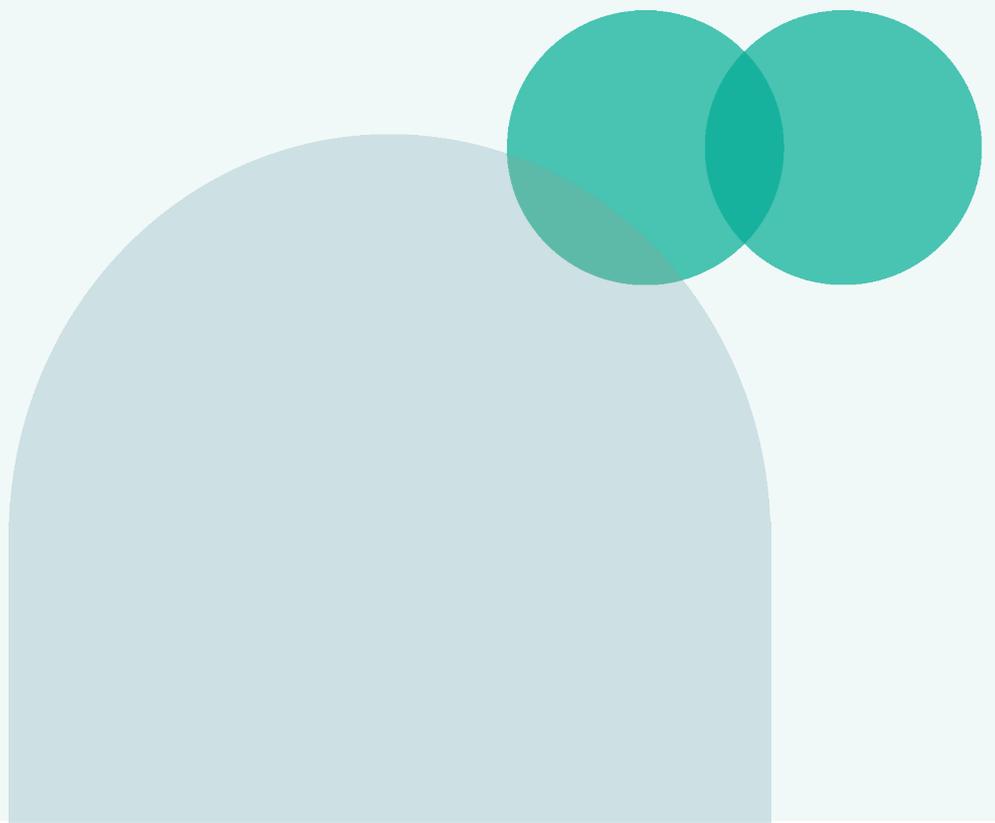


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Landcare Victoria and Projectura pay our respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands in Victoria.

We take inspiration from the legacy of Victorian Aboriginal people, who have produced food while caring for the ecological systems that life depends upon, for tens of thousands of years.





1. Introduction

A Landcare Plan for Victoria is under development. Due for completion in June 2023, the Plan will provide a united voice and future vision for the landcare community in Victoria.

The movement is strong and has a long, proud past, and the Plan will help landcare to continue growing and adapting. It will plan for ways to tackle internal challenges, such as funding sustainability and declining membership, as well as external crises, such as climate change and biodiversity decline.

Landcare Victoria is leading the development of the Plan with funding from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Landcare Victoria undertook preliminary engagement to inform the Plan with the landcare community between February and May 2022, where 313 people participated in interviews, workshops and an online survey. A full copy of the engagement findings is available at <https://www.landcarevictoria.org.au/LVI/Projects/Projects-LandcarePlan.aspx>

This paper further explores the top three issues identified in the engagement for the development of the Landcare Plan for Victoria. It aims to consider past investigations, studies, and wisdom documented about landcare to draw on these learnings when planning.

The review aims to identify areas for further exploration during the Plan's development and provides a series of recommendations to provide a focus for the next stage of work. The issues explored are:

- Brand recognition and purpose.
- Funding and resources.
- Community engagement and membership.

These will be further explored during another stage of workshops with the landcare community and stakeholders in early December 2022.

The findings of the next stage of engagement will inform a draft strategic priority statement for landcare in Victoria, which will be tested with the landcare community during March 2023. The draft Plan will be released for public consultation in April 2023.

Ten areas for further exploration have been identified during this review that should be considered during the development of the Victorian Landcare Plan. These include:

1. A process to create clear purpose and value proposition statements for landcare at the State level.
2. Government advocacy to sustain landcare funding and to promote how landcare are well placed to deliver on government priorities.
3. Alternative non-government funding sources or opportunities to advocate for innovative government funding.
4. The health of the government/landcare partnerships and areas for improvement.
5. How landcare can work with government to foster and trial private sector participation in restoration.
6. Supporting landholder access to carbon or environmental services markets.
7. Greater accessibility of the Landcare brand at a State level.
8. Engaging non-farmer and absentee landholders in landcare.
9. Flexible, event-based, or short-term volunteering opportunities.
10. Reducing administrative burdens at the local landcare group level.



2. Literature review

2.1. Raise the profile of landcare

During the preliminary engagement for the development of the Landcare Plan for Victoria, a common concern emerged around the role and value of landcare not being well articulated, measured, or communicated. Aligned with this were concerns that landcare lacks common goals, priorities, and messaging (Projectura, 2022).

Literature review

The word landcare is used in a variety of ways across Australia. Compton and Beeton (2012) explained that over the years, debate has occurred about what landcare constitutes and its meaning.

Since the formation of the first Landcare group in 1986 at Winjallock in North Central Victoria, there have been multiple ways the word landcare has been used. A quote from a participant in the preliminary engagement for the Landcare Plan for Victoria, stated *'Landcare has a clouded brand'* (Projectura, 2022).

Landcare can be used to refer to voluntary landcare groups or networks of groups, not for profit state or national organisations such as Landcare Victoria or Landcare Australia, government programs such as the National Landcare Program or the Victorian Landcare Team, the community movement of landcare, or to describe activities that lead to sustainable natural resource management.

The 2010-2020 Australian Framework for Landcare (Australian Landcare Council Secretariat, 2010), states that the Landcare approach comprises of:

- A philosophy, influencing the way people live in the landscape while caring for the land – the Landcare ethic.
- Local community action putting the philosophy into practice – the Landcare movement founded on stewardship and volunteers.
- A range of knowledge generation, sharing, and support mechanisms including groups, networks from district to national levels, facilitators and coordinators, government and non-government programs and partnerships – the Landcare model.

Henry et al. (2016) added to this list:

- Landcare groups and networks which, through the generation of social capital, promote positive behavioural norms, and motivate and facilitate the generation of community action and knowledge.

Henry et al (2016) also explained, *'While there is enormous diversity in the size, types and objectives of Landcare groups and networks, a common element across all initiatives is its grassroots, local nature.'*

If we focus on the community 'grassroots' landcare movement, including landcare groups and networks, Marshall et al. (2012) highlighted how the definition of landcare had changed over time. This ranges from groups solving their own land conservation issues in their own way in the early years of landcare through to, more recently, landcare being about the promotion of sustainable environmental and natural

resource management through collective action at the local or regional level.

On its website, Landcare Australia (2021) states that landcare plays *'a central role in sustainable agricultural practices and conservation activities, while also developing and enhancing community spirit'*.

Landcare Victoria's vision is *'for rich and diverse Victorian landscapes, supporting productive farming, healthy ecosystems and thriving communities'*.

During the preliminary community engagement for the development of a Landcare Plan for Victoria (Projectura, 2022), participants called for:

- The creation of a shared and strong value proposition to motivate people to step away from their home life and contribute.
- Demonstration of the value and achievements of landcare.
- Definition of the aims and outcomes of landcare.

As articulated by Ottensen in his 2019 literature review, *'one reason why Landcare's value proposition demands re-articulation is because, partly due to its complexity, measuring the value of Landcare is often fraught with difficulties'*. Quealy (2022), also called for an elevator pitch and smart definition for landcare.

A review of ten vision statements from Landcare Networks across Victoria showed a variety of themes and words used to describe regional landcare visions.¹

Each network has its own priorities and areas of focus, but there are central themes throughout all the landcare visions and definitions and descriptions based on sustainable agriculture, conservation, and community connections. Bringing these together to form a clear purpose and a compelling values proposition at a State level is an opportunity for the Landcare Plan for Victoria.

¹ Landcare vision statements reviewed include Yarra Ranges, Bass Coast, South Gippsland, Far East Victoria, Upper Campaspe, Upper Goulburn, Nillumbik, Wodonga Urban, Buloke and Northern Grampians and Gecko Clan.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

1. A process to create clear purpose and value proposition statements for landcare at the State level.

2.2. Funding and resources

The challenge of funding and resources, along with the opportunity to influence funding and policy, were strongly reflected in the initial consultation to inform the Landcare Plan for Victoria (Projectura, 2022). This included concerns about low funding availability for staff, a lack of Australian Government support, short-term funding, and government funding priorities not aligning with local priorities and the associated opportunities to advocate for landcare needs and program design.

The opportunity to increase or improve partnerships with large corporates, Catchment Management Authorities, Trust for Nature, Greening Australia, Bush Heritage, and philanthropic organisations was commonly mentioned.

Literature review

Funding challenges for Landcare are not new. Much has been written about changes to Australian Government funding in the 1990s and 2000s and how this impacted on landcare funding and activities (Curtis et al. 2008; Tennent and Lockie 2013; Marshall and DeBruyn 2022).

As reflected in the preliminary engagement for the Landcare Plan for Victoria (Projectura, 2022), concerns about the suitability and sustainability of landcare funding remain. Quotes from engagement participants included:

'Landcare is one of the longest and most consistently funded programs on both sides of government, but

there are no guarantees. There are always competing priorities.'

'Don't take government support for granted. The community and environment sector has changed e.g., landcare are competing with community energy groups.'

In 2019, it was estimated that 2,100 environmental volunteer groups existed in Victoria (DELWP, 2019), with just 600 of these being landcare groups (LVI, 2021). These numbers result in significant competition for government funds between the groups.

As stated by Martin and Werren (2022), *'future pressure on budgets means that it is unlikely that Australian governments will commit to substantively increased conservation funding. There is a real possibility that environmental funding by governments will continue to decrease'*. They noted that Federal and State budgets are under pressure from post-COVID recovery, declining terms of trade, slow economic growth, our aging population, and increased demand for healthcare.

In the 2022 Landcare Plan engagement (Projectura 2022), climate adaptation and mitigation were recognised as both a challenge and an opportunity. The crisis posed by climate change and the increasing political pressure, more frequent natural disasters, and increasing political pressure to act may also offer an opportunity for Landcare to leverage additional investment.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

2. Government advocacy to sustain landcare funding and to promote how landcare are well placed to deliver on government priorities such as climate change.

3. Alternative non-government funding sources or opportunities to advocate for innovative government funding.

Government funding and support

In the earlier engagement, a key identified strength of the landcare movement in Victoria was the Landcare

Facilitators funded through the Department Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Engagement participants spoke of how these positions *'were the oil that helps to keep the landcare car on the road'*.

The findings of the 2015 Victorian Landcare Program Review by RM Consulting Group explained that Landcare Facilitators and the Victorian Landcare Grants are very important to the viability and operation of many groups and networks across the State.

The 2020 RPS Group report on the return on investment of the government funding invested in the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program, estimates that the facilitators returned more than seven dollars in net project benefit for every dollar invested.

Given the importance of this funding and its value to the community; maintaining and nurturing this partnership between the Victorian State government and the landcare movement is vital. So too is the relationship with the Australian and local governments who provide funding to groups.

Martin and Werren (2022) explain that institutional arrangements often need to be better aligned to support landcare and the movement sometimes feels like they need to be treated as valued partners, in the government/landcare relationship. This sentiment was supported during the preliminary Landcare Plan engagement.

On the other hand, during the same engagement, government stakeholders also expressed concern about partnership health with landcare. One participant stated, *'I don't feel like we are respected as a partner, show us the money is the kind of feeling we get'*.

Through an extensive review of literature, Wildridge et.al. (2004), identified key factors that enable a successful partnership. These were summarised as having the right environment, membership, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources.

Opportunities to maintain and improve the health of government and landcare partnerships should be considered as part of the Landcare Plan. These could include:

- Identifying a shared vision and objectives between government and landcare.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Maintaining regular communication and relationships with all levels of government.
- Demonstrating the value of collaborating with landcare.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

4. The health of the government/landcare partnerships and areas for improvement.

Non-government funding and resources

The 2021 Australia State of the Environment Report recommended that further government leadership is required to foster private sector participation in environmental restoration. This recommendation included investigation into co-investment with private capital to improve the sustainability of private land management, opportunities to leverage existing markets (including the carbon market) to help deliver restoration, and changes to the tax code that can deliver environmental restoration. Opportunities for Victorian landcare to be involved in trialling or building business cases around these options should be considered.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

5. How landcare can work with government to foster and trial private sector participation in restoration.

Worldwide, many examples demonstrate successful private and not for profit partnerships. A 2016 report indicates that private investment in conservation is increasing across the world. *‘In just two years, the total private capital committed to conservation investments jumped by 62% to a total committed private capital of \$8.2 billion tracked from 2004 to 2015’.* (Hamrick, 2016).

Leveraging private or public investment is complex though, as highlighted by Skye Glenday, the Co-CEO

of Climate Friendly, in her presentation to the 2022 Digital Agrifood Summit: *‘there is a large and growing list of options for land managers to get involved in carbon farming or environmental services markets, including 16 agriculture and vegetation methods under the Emissions Reduction Fund, Climate Active and other carbon neutrality standards, Government Biodiversity Programs such as the Australian Governments C+B pilot’.* Other examples include the Victorian Government BushBank program and programs such as Accounting for Nature.

This growing diversity of non-government funding options creates opportunities for landcare and private landholders to access private investment. The diversity of options also means that it is difficult for landholders, landcare groups, or even larger landcare organisations to understand the best options to explore.

Projects like the ‘New Futures for Victorian Landcare’ project planned for delivery by Landcare Victoria aims to broker new partnerships to provide landcare with access to relevant expertise and new sources of funding. These projects will assist in providing much-needed clarity around funding opportunities to landcare.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

6. Ways to support landholders and landcare groups to improve understanding and access to carbon or environmental services markets.

Partnerships based on resources other than money are also an option that could be explored by landcare. As reflected in the 2008 Relationship Matters report (The Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2008), corporate entities form partnerships with not for profit organisations where they offer support in human resource development, training, finance, marketing, corporate governance, administration, strategy, and leadership development. Many of these skills could be useful to landcare at a Victorian or landcare network level.

Positive benefits for companies involved in not for profit partnerships include enhanced ‘license to

operate', enhanced brand awareness, becoming an employer of choice, and broadening the perspectives of employees through external community activities (The Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, 2008).

One of the difficulties for landcare in Victoria is that the Landcare logo is managed by Landcare Australia.

The Landcare Australia Brand Guidelines for Third Party use explain that '*commercial organisations may only use the Landcare logo if they have a sponsorship or partnership agreement with Landcare Australia which specifies how the logo can be used*'.

These strict arrangements can make it difficult for Victorian landcare or local landcare groups to create corporate partnerships at local and State levels.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

7. Greater accessibility of the Landcare brand at a State and local level.

2.3. Community engagement and membership

During the preliminary engagement for the development of the Landcare Plan for Victoria (Projectura, 2022), efforts to increase membership and community engagement in landcare were identified as challenging, with low member numbers reported to be causing burnout of key volunteers. The need to engage young people, new landholders, retirees, and corporate agriculture in landcare was regularly raised. The age profile of existing members was also raised as a key risk throughout the consultation.

Literature review

Volunteering Naturally (DELWP, 2021) provides 2019 data showing that volunteer groups who care for landscapes such as friends of and landcare groups are the most common environmental groups in Victoria, representing 64% of all environmental

volunteer groups. Although they reported that these groups only have 34% of all the environmental volunteers in the State and record 53% of the total hours spent by Victorian environmental volunteers. In comparison to other environmental volunteer groups, this could indicate high levels of workload on landcare members.

Marshall and de Bruyn (2022) suggested that landcare-type groups are now struggling in most districts of Australia, while Compton and Beeton (2012) cited a range of references indicating that landcare groups are disbanding and are in decline.

Annual reports from Landcare Victoria for the periods between 2018 and 2021 show a 4% decline in member groups over the past three years. Landcare Victoria member groups include landcare groups/networks and friends of groups.

In 2018, Landcare Victoria had 571 member groups with an average group size of 31.5 individuals. By 2021, there were 548 groups with an average of 33.4 individuals per group. This decline has been attributed to the difficulties associated with COVID-19. Data tracking the number of groups or members over a longer period has not yet been located.

23% of the groups reported in the 2022 Landcare Victoria Annual Report were in Port Phillip Western Port Catchment Management region, illustrating many groups in urban areas.

In rural areas, the number of 'farmer' landholders is decreasing, indicating that landcare needs to continue to try to attract more non-farming landholders. Curtis and Mendham (2011) presented data indicating that the proportion of non-farmer landholders is increasing in regional areas. Using examples from the Wimmera and Corangamite Catchment Management areas, they showed that 47% of Corangamite landholders and 33% of Wimmera landholders did not identify as farmers. They also noted that there were increasing rates of absentee property owners in these areas.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

8. Engaging non-farmer and absentee landholders in landcare.

The Victorian Environmental Volunteering Plan 2018 recognised the issue of aging volunteers and the challenge of recruiting younger members, stating that *'environmental volunteers tend to be older than the wider volunteering sector. While older Victorians may have more time for volunteer activities, environmental volunteer groups find it hard to recruit younger volunteers'*.

Further demographic data relating to landcare participation is unavailable; however, anecdotally, there is some concern that landcare membership is aging and that there is difficulty attracting young people to participate in landcare. As stated by a participant in the preliminary engagement to inform the Landcare Plan for Victoria, *'The environmental volunteering sector is at great risk if we don't think about how to pass on knowledge in the next 10 years'*, referring to the age profile of the sector (Projectura, 2022).

During the preliminary engagement, low membership numbers were reported to be causing burnout in groups. Although landcare networks provide an overarching regional collaboration of landcare groups, in most cases the administrative and governance burden of group operations is held by a small executive at the local group level.

As identified in the Victorian Environmental Volunteering Plan, environmental volunteering groups *'tend to offer structured, group-based volunteering opportunities that often need an ongoing commitment from members'*. The Plan then explained that volunteers are looking for flexible, event-based, short-term commitments, rather than traditional, structured or group-based volunteering opportunities offered through groups such as landcare (DELWP, 2018).

This balance between the administrative burden of landcare groups and the ways in which people prefer

to engage in volunteering is creating challenges for groups across the State.

According to DELWP's environmental volunteering survey (DELWP, 2018), the top three barriers to participation in environmental volunteering are a lack of time due to work or family commitments, involvement in other community organisations such as schools, sporting clubs, and churches, and a general lack of relevant information about environmental volunteering, the skills needed, and the activities on offer.

The Victorian Landcare Plan development must further explore:

9. Flexible, event-based, or short-term volunteering opportunities.

10. Reducing administrative burdens at the local landcare group level.



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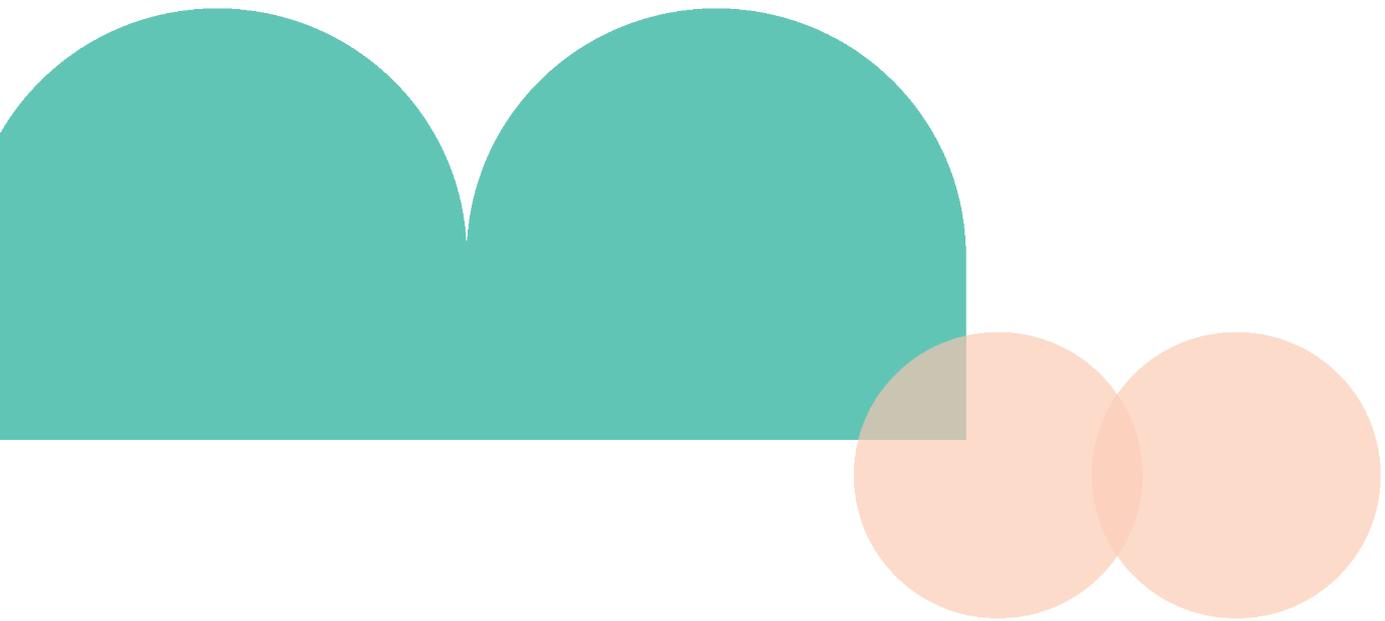
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