



SEAGRASS-WATCH E-BULLETIN

28 December 2007

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IN THIS BULLETIN

| | |
|---|---|
| NEWS | 1 |
| School competes to save Seagrass (NSW, Australia) | 1 |
| Peel handed back (Redland Bay, Queensland, Australia) | 2 |
| Endangered dugongs found dead in Abu Dhabi | 2 |
| Call to action - help save the dugong (Noosa, QLD, Australia) | 2 |
| Red Tide Killing Manatees (Orlando, FL, USA) | 2 |
| Conserving Cuba, After the Embargo (United States) | 3 |
| As seagrasses expand, state considers new rules to protect them (Fayetteville, NC, USA) | 3 |
| City growth bad for eco-health (Australia) | 3 |
| Strict environmental controls for channel deepening (Melbourne, Australia) | 4 |
| Coral Reefs Under Attack From Global Warming And Acidification Of Oceans (USA) | 4 |
| Spring decision expected for Midnight Pass (Sarasota, FL, USA) | 4 |
| Nations urged to adopt global vision to save oceans from climate-accelerated collapse (International) | 4 |
| Group Touts Seaweed As Warming Weapon | 5 |
| Scrambling to Save Coral's 'homeland' (NY, USA) | 5 |
| Scaling the depths for a stock-take of the piscatorial peninsula (Pakenham, Victoria, Australia) | 5 |
| 'Don't you worry about that' (Redland Bay, Queensland, Australia) | 5 |
| Manatees to Stay on Florida's Endangered List (Key Largo, Fla) | 6 |
| The ubiquitous storm drain / Pay attention (Atlantic City, NJ, USA) | 6 |
| Developer offers Port Geographe guarantee Western Australia, Australia | 6 |
| FROM HQ | 7 |
| Seagrass-Watch News Issue 31 | 7 |
| Seagrass-Watch Shop http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html | 7 |
| Virtual Herbarium | 7 |
| Giveaways | 7 |
| Future sampling dates | 7 |
| Handy Seagrass Links | 7 |

Please note: links to sources were active on date of publication. Some sources remove links periodically.

NEWS

School competes to save Seagrass (NSW, Australia)

18 December 2007 Hornsby Shire Council

Students from Brooklyn Public School were last week awarded with prizes and certificates for their outstanding entries in a competition to help raise awareness of Dangar Island's endangered seagrass bed. The competition, My Favorite Seagrass Animal, was part of a joint program between Hornsby Council and the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority, called the Dangar Island Seagrass Protection and Education program. The program aims to protect an area of seagrass found off the southern side of Dangar Island.

Council's Environmental Scientist, Kristy Guise, said, "The children produced some fantastic artwork, and the winning entries had three simple messages that everyone can follow. These were; don't dig boat propellers or anchors into the seagrass bed; look for buoys that surround the seagrass and keep away; and tell other people about the importance of the seagrass bed." The NSW Maritime Authority has placed nine yellow marker buoys around the area to help locals and visitors identify where the seagrass bed is located.

To learn more about the unique seagrass habitat and the animals that live within it, join the council's free seagrass workshops in January 2008. Workshops will be held at Bradley's Beach, Dangar Island at 3.00pm Sunday 6 and Monday 21 January 2008. For more information contact Kristy Guise on 9847 6899.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Peel handed back (Redland Bay, Queensland, Australia)

23 December 2007, by Susie Imer, Redland Bayside Bulletin

After a tumultuous history that excluded everyone but a handful of incarcerated residents, Peel Island has at last been handed back to the people of Australia. Teerk Roo Ra (pronounced took-a-ra – say it quickly) National Park and Conservation Park was publicly declared on heritage listed Peel Island in Moreton Bay last Tuesday

The new national park covering 519 hectares was announced by Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation Minister Andrew McNamara to an audience of Quandamooka traditional owners, state and local government representatives, former lazaret patients and staff, members of Friends of Peel Island, conservationists and history buffs, as they gathered at Polka Point on North Stradbroke Island.

The island's historical importance is matched by its environmental significance with 74 bird species, 28 plant species, three types of mammals, eight reptile types and two frog types so far recorded on the island. The island also has sedgelands, melaleuca swamps and open forests, and is fringed by mangroves, coral reef, significant beds of seagrass and the magnificent crescent of beach, known as Horseshoe Bay.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Endangered dugongs found dead in Abu Dhabi

17 December 2007, Middle East online

ABU DHABI – A team of field scientists from the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi (EAD) this month came across two dugongs trapped in an abandoned drift Gillnet (Al Hayali), close to Abu Al Abyad Island. "This discovery clearly demonstrates once again the vulnerability of these majestic animals to human threats. We call on the community once again to help support our efforts in protecting this endangered treasure," said Majid Al Mansouri, Secretary General of EAD.

Studies conducted by EAD experts have indicated that the two dugongs suffocated to death in gill-nets. Drift nets (Al Hayali) and Encircling gill nets (Al Halaq) are banned by Law in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, however, abandoned nets and illegal use of banned nets continue to be a major cause of dugong mortality in the area.

Moreover, Dugongs are at risk from boat strikes and disturbances in areas, where high boating traffic coincides with dugong habitat. Dugongs are also indirectly at risk due to the destruction of their main habitat, seagrass. Seagrass which occur in coastal and shallow water areas and require light for their growth, are particularly vulnerable from increasing developmental activities along the coast such as dredging, land filling, coastal clearing and land reclamation as well as eutrophication (an increase in chemical nutrients) from sewage and other effluents.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Call to action - help save the dugong (Noosa, QLD, Australia)

15 November 2007

The dugong, those large, vegetarian marine mammals, are in need of your help. At 400kg adult weight, these docile creatures feed solely on seagrass. Sadly, seagrass beds are threatened by erosion, which is escalated by poor land use practices such as land clearing, deforestation, overgrazing, unmanaged construction activity and road building.

Populations of the dugong have shown marked declines of around 95 per cent throughout southern Queensland over the past 50 years. This decline appears to have occurred in the more developed and urbanised coastal areas and is related to the lack of seagrasses.

The movement of unconsolidated sediment (erosion) finds its way into watercourses and ends up in the ocean. Extreme sediment loads in these marine systems results in destruction of seagrass beds, and ultimately to the demise of the beautiful sea creature, the dugong. The Black Mountain Range Catchment Project (BMRCP), a Landcare initiative, is doing its bit for the marine environment, but needs your assistance to plant trees to help the dugong.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Red Tide Killing Manatees (Orlando, FL, USA)

26 December, 2007, Central Florida News

Nine manatees have turned up dead in Brevard and Volusia counties in the last two months, and marine biologists suspected they were killed by red tide.

"Red tide on the East Coast is rare, especially affecting manatees," marine biologist Anne Spellman said. "The last time we had a red tide was in 2002, and one manatee died, in Indian River County." "Normally on the East Coast, our big concern is cold weather, but to have a red tide thrown in with that is a cause for concern for us," Spellman said. "They [manatee] eat sea grass, and when they eat large amounts where the red tide is stuck to it, the manatees accumulate it, and it causes paralysis, and the manatees eventually drown," Spellman explained.

Full story and source: http://www.cfnews13.com/News/Local/2007/12/26/red_tide_killing_manatees.html

Conserving Cuba, After the Embargo (United States)

25 December 2007 By Cornelia Dean, New York Times

Through accidents of geography and history, Cuba is a priceless ecological resource. That is why many scientists are so worried about what will become of it after Fidel Castro and his associates leave power and, as is widely anticipated, the American government relaxes or ends its trade embargo.

Conservationists, environmental lawyers and other experts, from Cuba and elsewhere, met last month in Cancún, Mexico, to discuss the island's resources and how to continue to protect them.

In a report last year, the World Wildlife Fund said that "in dramatic contrast" to its island neighbors, Cuba's beaches, mangroves, reefs, seagrass beds and other habitats were relatively well preserved. Their biggest threat, the report said, was "the prospect of sudden and massive growth in mass tourism when the U.S. embargo lifts."

Full story and source: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/25/science/25cuba.html?_r=1&ref=science&oref=slogin

Related links: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/12/25/healthscience/25cuba.php>

As seagrasses expand, state considers new rules to protect them (Fayetteville, NC, USA)

24 December 2007, FayObserver.com

An unexpected expansion of underwater seagrass along North Carolina's coast has come as state agencies work on a revised definition of the habitat, a discussion that could protect more areas from human disturbance. Officials with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries have said the state must modify the definition of seagrass to more accurately describe the habitat - and possibly help identify and protect areas that could support the seagrass.

But much of the shallow areas ideal for seagrass growth lies in territory ideal for piers or docks. So the discussion among state officials has some regulators and developers worried about what a new definition could mean for coastal development.

The debate comes as clusters of the so-called submerged aquatic vegetation have sprouted in places where it hadn't been for years. Researchers are trying to figure out whether the grasses are recolonizing old habitat or expanding their range - and why they're doing so. New beds are popping up around Topsail Island and appear ready to grow in New Hanover's highly developed tidal creeks and other coastal waters.

Fisheries officials have said a new, broad-based definition is important because some of the vegetation is seasonal. Others can appear one year and not the next. And regulators want to make sure that dredging or development won't cut into the areas where seagrass could grow.

Mike Durako, a marine biologist at UNC Wilmington, said while dredging through sea grass effectively destroys the seagrass habitat, people can still build smaller docks to limit how much water they shadow. "Having seagrass doesn't necessarily prevent people from developing their shoreline," Durako said. "But accommodations have to be made."

Full story and source: http://www.fayobserver.com/article_ap?id=115342

Related links: http://www.fayobserver.com/article_ap?id=115342

City growth bad for eco-health (Australia)

19 December 2007, by Sarah Wotherspoon, Melbourne Herald Sun

The health of Melbourne's rivers, native vegetation and biodiversity is being threatened by rapid urbanisation and land clearing. The inaugural Melbourne Environment Report, released yesterday by the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, said native vegetation losses were threatening native species habitat, water quality and biological diversity.

The report found less than one-third of rivers in Melbourne and surrounding areas had been assessed as in excellent or good conditions. It said 77 per cent of rivers in Melbourne and surrounding catchments were in a moderate to very poor condition, due mainly to population growth and pollution from storm water.

The report also found:

WATER quality in Port Phillip Bay is the best it has been in 20 years.

AQUIFER levels in the Mornington Peninsula area are steadily declining.

TURBIDITY and sediment levels in northern and eastern Western Port Bay remain high and seagrass loss has been extreme.

ONLY 12 per cent of rivers in the Melton-Greater Geelong region are in good or excellent condition.

COMMUNITY groups are taking a leading role in most areas and developing environment protection programs.

The report looked at the extent of native vegetation, river health, water quality, groundwater supply, park conditions and the strength of community groups. Indicators were given a rating of excellent to very poor based on whether they met or were on track to meet environmental targets set in 2003.

Full story and source: <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22946634-2862,00.html>

Strict environmental controls for channel deepening (Melbourne, Australia)

18 December 2007, Media-NewsWire.com

Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings, today imposed three conditions on his approval of the Port of Melbourne Corporation's application to deepen the main shipping channels in Port Phillip Bay. Mr Jennings gave his approval under the Coastal Management Act 1995 subject to the Port of Melbourne Corporation adhering to a comprehensive Environmental Management Plan (EMP), backed up by a \$100 million environmental bond and overseen by an Independent Environmental Monitor.

"The EMP that has been prepared for the project is enforceable by law and the environmental safeguards that it provides are unprecedented for dredging in Australia". Mr Jennings said. "The EMP details monitoring of the highest standard in terms of water quality, noise and other issues such as seagrass, fish populations and penguins. "Monitoring of the dredging will take place on, above and below the surface of the water and will include use of underwater surveying, underwater video, fixed buoys, buoys towed by boats and aerial photography.

Mr Jennings said the EMP had been amended to incorporate the environmental management measures the Port of Melbourne Corporation is required to undertake over and above the SEES, as recently stipulated by the Planning Minister. "This includes particular measures to monitor the seagrass, control dredging operation in the entrance and monitor wetlands."

Full story and source: http://media-newsWire.com/release_1058932.html

Coral Reefs Under Attack From Global Warming And Acidification Of Oceans (USA)

13 December 2007, by Linda Young - AHN News

Washington, DC (AHN) - The world's coral reefs are being killed. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday that new research finds carbon emissions are threatening coral reefs. The findings are timely as 2008 is the International Year of the Reef.

According to a statement from NOAA released Thursday, a group of 18 leading scientist in international coral reef research have found the source of the threat to coral reefs. They blame steadily rising global temperatures and an increase in acidification of oceans from increased carbon dioxide emissions for creating conditions that pose such a threat to coral that they could begin to disappear from the earth in 50 to 75 years.

As sea levels rise, a healthy reef can keep up with that by building more reef ... and can continue to protect our shorelines, but without that reef building, the shore lines that are protected by reefs will be doubly in trouble. Coral reefs, sea grass and mangroves "all protect us from the ocean but the mangroves and the sea grass protect reefs from people, from our pollution so all the systems are very, very important," Muller said.

Full story and source: <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7009448030>

Spring decision expected for Midnight Pass (Sarasota,FL,USA)

12 December 2007, by Roger Drouin, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

SIESTA KEY -- Local officials expect to hear word by April about a state permit that is the first regulatory obstacle to reopening Midnight Pass. Midnight Pass was closed in 1982 after a project failed that would have moved the inlet away from homes that were threatened by erosion from the pass. Before it closed, the inlet separated southern Siesta Key from Casey Key.

The permitting effort hit the biggest of several snags two years ago when both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers signaled opposition to the reopening of the pass.

Supporters have argued for two decades that reopening the pass would allow salt water to flush into the bay, triggering a recovery of seagrass habitat and making the area once again hospitable to a variety of small critters and fish. Some environmentalists oppose reopening the pass because they say that a new ecosystem, a hatchery for fish and shellfish, has been created, and that the pass would destroy mangroves and seagrass beds. The project is estimated to cost more than \$22 million for dredging and maintenance over 30 years.

Full story and source: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20071212/NEWS/712120508/-1/newssitemap>

Nations urged to adopt global vision to save oceans from climate-accelerated collapse (International)

11 December 2007, UN Observer

Twenty five years on from the launch of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea the state of the world's oceans has considerably deteriorated. Overfishing has left most global fish stocks perilously close to commercial collapse whilst global warming is putting increasing pressure on fragile ecosystems, such as mangroves, coral reefs and seagrasses, upon which so many people's livelihoods depend. IUCN is recommending a rapid acceleration in the establishment of marine protected areas to help the oceans become more resilient in the face of climate change.

Currently only one percent of the oceans enjoy some level of protection, a long way short of the 10% target the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity set itself to achieve by 2010.

<http://www.unobserver.com/layout5.php?id=4163&blz=1>

Group Touts Seaweed As Warming Weapon

7 December 2007, by Joseph Coleman, The Associated Press

BALI, Indonesia (AP) — Slimy, green and unsightly, seaweed and algae are among the humblest plants on earth. A group of scientists at a climate conference in Bali say they could also be a potent weapon against global warming, capable of sucking damaging carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere at rates comparable to the mightiest rain forests.

"The ocean's role is neglected because we can't see the vegetation," said Chung Ik-kyo, a South Korean environmental scientist. "But under the sea, there is a lot of seaweed and seagrass that can take up carbon dioxide."

Proponents say seaweed and algae's rapid rate of photosynthesis, the process of turning carbon dioxide and sunlight into energy and oxygen, is a top factor in its effectiveness in carbon absorption. Some types of seaweed can grow three or four meters (yards) long in only three months. Lee Jae-young, with South Korea's fisheries ministry, said some seaweeds can absorb five times more carbon dioxide than terrestrial plants.

The concept, however, has problems. Skeptics, for instance, say that trees are effective for carbon storage because they can last for many years, while seaweed is cultivated and harvested in cycles of only months, meaning the storage will be hard to measure or control.

Full story and source http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5j65kEEedSFjVMY_sLORHzEqN4iZlgD8TCVGU80

Related links: http://www.kois.go.kr/News/News/NewsView.asp?serial_no=20071210020

Scrambling to Save Coral's 'homeland' (NY,USA)

12 December 2007, By Charles J. Hanley, Forbes

KIMBE BAY, Papua New Guinea - For time beyond memory on this remote bay of neon fish and underwater gardens, people have avoided the "masalai," taboo waters, where a monster octopus might lurk or spirits dwell in coral caves. Now it's science that wants no-go zones in Kimbe Bay, and it's because of a new fear.

The region, epitomized by this gorgeous, volcano-ringed bay on the Pacific's western fringe, shelters more than half of all the world's coral and 75 percent of its hundreds of species, from graceful fan and sprawling table-shaped types, to staghorn, elkhorn and brain coral. Half the world's species of reef fish swim its waters.

The U.S.-based environmental group Nature Conservancy, working with Veron and other foreign and Papua New Guinean scientists, is leading the way here on New Britain island, with an ambitious plan to establish 15 restricted zones in the 3,300-square-mile Kimbe Bay. It's one of the first plans for "marine protected areas" dealing specifically with climate change.

The bay, a vast collection of habitats, including isolated seamounts, coastal mangrove forests and seagrass beds, also is home to sperm whales and sea turtles, sharks and dugong. It has quietly become one of the premier scuba diving destinations on Earth.

Full story and source: <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2007/12/07/ap4415501.html>

Related link: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2007/12/09/2003391812>

Scaling the depths for a stock-take of the piscatorial peninsula (Pakenham, Victoria, Australia)

7 December 2007, by Andrew Mathieson, Australian Star

Recreational scuba divers and snorkellers have taken to the water to inspect inhabitants below the surface in a third Great Victorian Fish Count. The annual census to monitor and care for marine life at Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary, St Leonards pier and offshore from Queenscliff will continue for another two weekends.

Ms Roberts said volunteers were recording fish numbers and species among the peninsula's kelp forests, sponge gardens and seagrass meadows. Scientists, recreational managers and conservation groups would benefit from the data, she said.

Full story and source: <http://www.senews.com.au/story/52546>

'Don't you worry about that' (Redland Bay, Queensland, Australia)

06 December 2007 by Daniel Hurst, Redland Bayside Bulletin

A Redland environmentalist has declared that boaties have "nothing to worry about" with planned fishing bans in Moreton Bay. The comments from Wildlife Preservation Society spokesman Simon Baltais came after fishing and seafood industry groups blasted the State Government's marine conservation plan as "overkill".

The proposed rezoning, which would see fishing banned in 15 per cent of the Moreton Bay marine park, has been released for public comment before the final plan takes effect late next year. Mr Baltais called for expanded green

zones, saying it was important to properly protect habitats such as the Amity Banks area north of Peel Island, where a variety of marine creatures feed on a large seagrass bed.

"It's got the only dugong population next to a major capital city, it supports the largest resident bottle-nose dolphin population and the highest aggregation of green turtles," he said. The Government's draft plan includes an "Amity Banks" green zone, but the document says the zone does not extend further east so the impact on recreational fishing and commercial operations is minimised.

Full story and source: <http://redland.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/dont-you-worry-about-that/1100106.html>

Manatees to Stay on Florida's Endangered List (Key Largo, Fla)

5 December 2007, By Jessica Gresko, The Associated Press

Manatees will remain on Florida's endangered species list for now. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission decided Wednesday to delay a vote on removing the manatee from the list until the commission can review the animal species classification system. The commission did not specify when the classification review may be done.

Manatees have been on the state endangered list since 1979. This year's annual census recorded about 2,800 of the gentle animals in Florida water, up from around 1,300 counted during the first survey in 1991. State experts say the aquatic mammals are no longer at imminent risk of extinction, the definition of endangered. Reclassifying them as threatened — describing them as facing a high risk of extinction — is more appropriate, state officials said.

It would not mean a change in the protection enjoyed by the species, and the manatee would continue to have federal endangered status. The state protections are largely based on creating slow speed zones for boaters to protect the animals from collisions. The biggest threats to the species are the loss of their favored warm-water habitats and boat propellers.

The commission on Wednesday did approve a conservation plan that calls for statistically sound methods to estimate the manatee population and monitor trends. The plan also call for developing ways to prevent future manatee deaths due to habitat loss. That includes the potential loss of warm water habitats created around power plants as well as springs where manatees thrive.

Full story and source: <http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hZwzBUJreWWupDRNjbYdpEiKoQAD8TBIFPO1>

The ubiquitous storm drain / Pay attention (Atlantic City, NJ, USA)

5 December 2007, Press of Atlantic City

Few waterways in rapidly developing coastal southern New Jersey are immune from the threat of storm-runoff pollution, but development pressures along both shores of the narrow Barnegat Bay make it particularly vulnerable.

When it rains, large amounts of nitrogen from our overfertilized, manicured lawns wash down storm drains, which in many cases empty directly into the nearest body of water. In Barnegat Bay and other places, the nitrogen fuels algae growth, which blocks sunlight from the bay bottom. The lack of sunlight kills seagrass, which is an important shellfish habitat. When the algae bloom dies, the decomposition process sucks oxygen out of the water, further stressing marine life.

The good news is that people are paying more attention. Last week, Long Beach, Barnegat and Little Egg Harbor townships joined with the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve to announce an "Adopt a Storm Drain" program. Other coastal towns have similar programs. The idea is to get volunteers to monitor particular drains - and to raise the public's consciousness.

Full story and source: <http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/editorials/story/7520626p-7420679c.html>

Developer offers Port Geographe guarantee (Western Australia, Australia)

5 December 2007, Busselton Dunsborough Mail

The developer of Port Geographe has offered a bank guarantee to fund one third of the estimated cost of modifying the existing groynes. Port Geographe development manager Rhys Kelly said the developer was committed to finding, and contributing its fair share of funding, to a solution to the problems of seagrass and sand build-up at Port Geographe.

Some of the residents are concerned that dangerous levels of hydrogen sulphide may be getting emitted from seagrass buildup on the foreshore. Mr Kelly has since raised concern about the Port Geographe Action Group's measurement of hydrogen sulphide levels. "The only organisation to have conducted independent and expert hydrogen sulphide testing is the Shire of Busselton, which conducted its testing under guidance from the Department of Health," he said. "However, it was interesting to note that the 15 minute average of 2.4ppm recorded by the PGAG is well below the Australian standard for short term exposure of 15ppm."

Later in the elector's meeting resident Ron Palmer pointed out concerns about the engineering of the groynes. "I approached the council nine years ago with a machine to get rid of the seagrass. Resident Scott McKay also questioned the selection of engineering consultants on the Port Geographe area and suggested an alternative. Full story and source: <http://busselton.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/developer-offers-port-geographe-guarantee/1098940.html> Related links: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/12/07/2112251.htm?site=southwestwa>

FROM HQ

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 31 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/newsletters.html>

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- Seagrasses of Australia
- Phytoplankton Guide
- Seagrass Biology (Volume 2 only)
- Bookmarks
- Stickers
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 31 (hardcopy)
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- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 29 (hardcopy)
- Seagrass-Watch Newsletter 28 (hardcopy)

Future sampling dates <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/sampling.html>

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