

A SAFE AND THRIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL



Photo: Lutgart Uten

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We acknowledge the Ngunnawal (Ngunawal), Ngambri and Ngarigo Peoples as Traditional Custodians on the land on which we live and work, extending respect to all other First Nations people with connection to this region.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and we benefit from stolen Country.

We recognise the deep and continuing connection that First Nations Peoples have with land, sea, culture and community.

We are striving to stand in allyship with First Nations communities for self-determination and environmental justice. First Nation people's cultural roots extend to caring for the rivers, waterways, plants, animals and ecosystems of their Country.

The Conservation Council ACT Region respects and honours Ngunnawal (Ngunawal), Ngambri and Ngarigo people's past and ongoing connection and care for our environment.

A SAFE AND THRIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL

The ACT, like the rest of Australia, has been deeply affected by the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The ACT is home to nationally significant woodlands and grasslands and our urban landscape is embedded in this natural environment. Nature itself is intrinsically valuable and has a right to thrive. Investing in nature means that we are nurturing the systems on which we depend and are a part of. In the face of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, we must be ambitious and we must act now.

Continual outward urban development is causing habitat destruction. As a result, there continue to be more plants and animals added to the ACT and Federal threatened species lists, putting them at risk of extinction. To prevent the environmentally destructive impacts of urban development, the ACT Government must focus on building more affordable housing within our current city footprint.



We can ensure a just transition by speeding up the phase out of fossil gas, banning fossil fuel advertisement and sponsorship, and reducing emissions from our transport sector. Programs that support equitable access to electrification and a zero-carbon transport system are essential.

The Conservation Council ACT Region is striving to protect nature and ensure a safe climate. To address these crises, the ACT Government must harness and support the expertise and skills of our community to protect the natural environment and reduce emissions. This document outlines our priority areas for action, for which we are seeking support from all candidates in the 2024 ACT Election.



Photo: Lutgart Uten

PROTECTING OUR REGION'S NATURE

The ACT, like the rest of Australia, is undergoing a biodiversity extinction crisis. Canberra's mature trees are being removed at alarming rates¹; our faunal emblem, the Gang-gang Cockatoo is endangered; and our natural areas are at increasing risk of development and degradation².

Australia's unique animals and plants are under significant pressure. In July 2022, a landmark State of the Environment Report was released outlining that overall Australia's natural environment is "poor and deteriorating."³ The report found more extinctions are expected in the next decades. The ACT is also experiencing this biodiversity crisis with five new species added to the ACT Threatened Native Species List since the last ACT Government Election in 2020⁴. Urban development, invasive species and climate change pose the largest threats to biodiversity, including in the ACT.



1 Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2023. Loss of Mature Native Trees Key Threatening Process Action Plan. Accessed via: https://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2316188/Loss-of-Mature-Native-Trees.pdf

2 Office of Sustainability and the Environment. ACT State of Environment Report 2023, "Canberra's Urban Boundary." Accessed via: <https://www.actsoe2023.com.au/issues/canberras-urban-boundary/>

3 Australian Government, 2021. Australia State of the Environment Report 2021.

4 ACT Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. Threatened Species and Ecological Communities. Accessed via: <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/nature-conservation/conservation-and-ecological-communities/threatened-species-and-ecological-communities>. The five additional species are the Gang-gang Cockatoo, Mountain Skink, Yellow-bellied Glider, Keys Matchstick Grasshopper and the Pilotbird.

The ACT has 58 threatened species and two critically endangered ecological communities⁵. The protection of remaining Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands is especially important given their national significance, their intrinsic value, the amenity they bring to our city and their role as habitat for many threatened species. In view of the pressure on biodiversity across the ACT, all areas of moderate to high conservation value should now be appropriately protected and managed for effective conservation outcomes.

How environmental laws and policies are administered by the ACT government and environmental statutory office holders is critical to achieving strong environmental outcomes⁶. It is therefore essential that there are best practice environmental governance arrangements in place to ensure that fundamental accountability principles are upheld in relation to environmental management.

IMPLEMENT THE BIODIVERSITY NETWORK

As the 'bush capital', Canberra is fortunate to host a mosaic of natural areas in and around the city. Many of the larger natural areas are protected under the ACT's reserve system. But this system does not adequately protect all the Territory's natural values, leaving many unprotected and at risk of mismanagement.

In December 2022, The Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands published *Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT*⁷. The aims of this key document are to formalise conservation and management of biodiversity outcomes on multiple tenures including public and leased land, by identifying them as Conservation Areas, through a combination of protection, restoration and reconnection compatible with other land management objectives.

⁵ Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2024. Threatened Species and Ecological Communities. Accessed via: <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/nature-conservation/conservation-and-ecological-communities/threatened-species-and-ecological-communities>

⁶ GreenLaw, 2023. Final Report: Environmental Governance in the ACT. Available at: <https://www.actsoe2023.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Environmental-Governance-in-the-ACT.pdf>

⁷ Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands, 2022. Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT. Available at: https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BRIEFING_BIODIVERSITY-NETWORK-_Final_Version_December.pdf

Implementing the Biodiversity Network will protect and enhance all remaining threatened species and communities in the ACT in perpetuity. By protecting remnants of natural value that are not reserved, these remnants, together with those in reserve, will be unified into a single management framework for protection and implementation of ecological management. Therefore conservation can be achieved across land tenures, without compromising the land uses that may exist in those places.

Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT is the key policy position for the Conservation Council ACT Region as its implementation will result in planning and land management that enhances long-term biodiversity outcomes. The statements outlined below are underpinned by the implementation of the Biodiversity Network, as it enables best environmental protection and management.



Implement changes to legislation to ensure in-perpetuity protection for Conservation Areas within the Biodiversity Network

1. In line with Recommendation 20 of the Inquiry into the Territory Plan⁸, implement the Biodiversity Network to ensure Conservation Areas outside the reserve system of moderate to high conservation value or needed for environmental connectivity are protected in perpetuity, and managed for their ecological values.
2. Introduce a formal program of voluntary environmental stewardship on rural and other leased land, that incorporates protection in perpetuity.
3. Consider options to provide protection through the Planning Act and the Nature Conservation Act that includes enabling simultaneous compatible uses⁹.

Implement ecological management in all Conservation Areas

4. Commence ecological management of Conservation Areas, and within key landscape connectivity areas.
5. Adequately resource the restoration of native vegetation and habitat to improve ecological condition.
6. Adequately resource rangers and land managers to manage Conservation Areas across the ACT, and to support rural lessees and Parkcare and Landcare volunteers.
7. Ensure alignment of government programs, such as the Urban Tree Planting Program, with appropriate biodiversity outcomes.



Photo: Lutgart Uten

⁸ Legislative Assembly for the ACT Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. Inquiry into the Territory Plan and Other Associated Documents. Accessed via: https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2416190/Inquiry-into-the-Territory-Plan-and-other-associated-documents-report-CURRENT-version.pdf

⁹ Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands, 2022. Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT. pp.19

Protect priority Conservation Areas

8. No industrial or urban development in the Western Edge Investigation Area.
9. Ensure protection from disturbance or loss for all Conservation Areas across the Territory, including within the Western Edge Investigation Area.
10. Provide Nature Reserve status to Ngununggula/ Bluetts Block.
11. Incorporate Conservation Areas, including Ainslie Volcanics and Glenloch grasslands, into adjacent reserves.
12. Develop a Conservation Management Plan for Central Molonglo.
13. When ceded to the ACT Government, provide reserve status for Lawson Grasslands.



Photo: Lutgart Uten



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SUPPORT COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

14. Provide secure, long-term operational funding for Landcare ACT and member Catchment Groups.
15. Fund, support and enhance community-led environmental programs including Canberra Nature Map, Vegwatch, Waterwatch, Frogwatch and Fauna monitoring programs.
16. Provide additional Transport Canberra City Services (TCCS) rangers to support urban community on-ground programs.

ENSURE BEST PRACTICE MANAGEMENT OF PEST PLANTS AND ANIMALS

17. Ensure there is adequate and secure funding to manage invasive species, including for increased staffing and expertise of ACT Government land managers, resources to detect and manage new threats, and for trials for improved long-term control and maintenance of naturalised species.
18. By the beginning of 2026, implement and enforce full cat containment where all cats, no matter the age or suburb, are contained territory wide.

ENSURE BEST PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

19. Remove Environment from the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to create a separate directorate responsible for land management, modelled on the previous Environment ACT agency.
20. Establish the Environment Protection Authority and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna as independent statutory bodies.
21. Review and consolidate all actions from ACT Government action plans, conservation strategies and plans of management to reduce duplication and confirm key priorities. Subsequently, fully fund and implement these priorities, applying specific timeframes to improve accountability.
22. Implement an education program about ecological management on public and private land, including tree retention, for community, arborists and relevant ACT Government staff across directorates.
23. Prepare, fund and implement emergency management plans for flora and fauna in response to extreme weather events.

SUPPORT THE PROTECTION OF NATIVE FORESTS IN OUR REGION

24. Help protect native forests in our region and uphold the right to a healthy environment:
 - a) Phase out wood-burning heaters in urban Canberra by 2030, in line with the Right to a Healthy Environment.
 - b) Ban the advertising, sale and installation of new and replacement wood heaters from January 2025.
 - c) Require all firewood sold in the ACT to meet forest certification (Forest Stewardship Council) standards.
 - d) Declare ACT Government support for an end to native forest logging nationally.

A SAFE CLIMATE

Climate change is the most significant threat to the survival of all life on earth. The impacts of a changing climate are well upon us: increasingly severe fires, storms, floods, heatwaves and droughts are forcing societies and natural ecosystems to transform how they function.

In its Sixth Assessment Report (2023) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that global greenhouse gas emissions must halve by 2030 if temperature rise is to be limited to 1.5°C¹⁰. Despite this, Australia has the highest per capita emissions in the OECD¹¹ and continues to approve new fossil fuel projects. This country is the world's third largest fossil fuel exporter, mining 57 tonnes of fossil fuel CO₂ per Australian per year – ten times greater than the world average.

¹⁰ IPCC, 2023, 'Urgent climate action can secure a liveable future for all', Press release, 20 March, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/press/IPC_C_AR6_SYR_PressRelease_en.pdf

¹¹ Swann, T, 2019, 'High carbon from a land down under: Quantifying CO₂ from Australia's fossil fuel mining and exports', The Australia Institute, https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/P667-High-Carbon-from-a-Land-Down-Under-WEB_0_0.pdf



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Although the ACT is a small jurisdiction, it led the nation in achieving 100% renewable electricity and legislating targets of net-zero emissions and phasing out fossil gas by 2045. Even so, our actions locally and nationally to avoid further emissions and adapt to predicted changes must accelerate, be ambitious, and be guided by principles of social equity and climate justice. With cooperative commitment and purposeful public and private investment, the ACT can implement innovative policies to rapidly decarbonise all sectors, particularly transport which contributes over 60% of the ACT's emissions (see 'Sustainable transport' policy) and buildings (the focus of this policy), demonstrating how to build resilience and ensure a just transition to a low-carbon economy.



1. Increase service funding for SEE Change, the Canberra Environment Centre and Conservation Council ACT Region to implement safe climate activities.
2. Develop a new Climate Change Strategy for 2026–2030 and beyond, in consultation with the Canberra community and the ACT Climate Change Council, with specific, funded, world's-best-practice actions to accelerate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and draw-down of atmospheric carbon dioxide to reach net-zero emissions as rapidly as possible, and by 2040 at the latest.
3. Implement all recommendations by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment for reducing Scope 3 emissions.



4. As the fossil gas network makes the second largest contribution to the ACT's emissions (after transport), by the end of 2024, publish and implement a plan for the proactive, strategic phase-out of all gas connections by 2035 (with extensions only for the most difficult-to-replace applications), including:
- From 2025, ban all new gas connections (ie revise all projects with planned gas not yet connected);
 - From 2025, prohibit the installation of new gas appliances or replacement of a gas appliance with another gas appliance, and immediately ban advertising of gas appliances;
 - From 2025, provide a free "case manager" service to guide households through electrification.
 - Continue to fund the Sustainable Household Scheme, and review it in 2025 to identify equitable opportunities to encourage more households to electrify as soon as possible;
 - Expand the Home Energy Support Program by 2025 to directly fund electrification and other energy efficiency measures for low-income and vulnerable households and social housing;
 - Fund the electrification of all ACT Government assets (schools, health facilities, offices, utilities, etc) and community centres, prioritising the electrification of all social housing by 2030;
 - Require all free-standing rental housing to electrify by 2030;
 - Require all multi-unit and commercial buildings to issue by end-2026 a plan to electrify by 2035;
 - Fund industry information campaigns and trades sector training to support this transition.
 - Advocate to Australian Government for electrification funding, eg rebates, low-cost loans, taxation deductions etc

5. Increase uptake of solar power, battery and energy monitoring systems, including:

- From 2025 require all new buildings to install solar power systems;
- Install solar power systems on all social housing and suitable ACT Government facilities by 2030;
- Require all existing commercial and multi-unit residential buildings to install solar power systems (wherever practicable) by 2035;
- Wherever possible, make these installations “smart” as investments in a resilient, efficient, multi-flow electricity network.



Photo: Hedda.M

6. By 2026, strengthen minimum energy efficiency standards to require all rental homes to meet 7 stars by 2035 (ie match the NCC standard for new buildings).
7. Ensure that the ACT's compliance procedures for sustainable building standards meet or exceed best practices among Australian states and territories.
8. Establish an Extreme Weather Resilience Team that is responsible for coordinating all government, business and community arrangements (alerts, "climate-safe rooms", refuges, volunteer efforts, medical support etc) are in place to ensure health and safety during severe weather events (fires, storms, floods, smoke, heat, dust, pollen etc).
9. In the ACT Government's Sustainable Procurement Policy, require suppliers to screen their supply chains to exclude all companies and financial institutions that provide support to fossil fuel projects.
10. By the end of 2025, ban fossil fuel sponsorship and advertising (companies, products) in the ACT.
11. By the end of 2026, pilot the use of "Climate assemblies", managed by the ACT Climate Change Council, that randomly select Canberrans to guide decision-making on the ACT's climate policies.





12. By the end of 2026, review and update the ACT Government Responsible Investment Policy in line with the highest standards and recommendations by the Australia Sustainable Finance Institute, the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment and ShareAction.
13. Under the Urban Forest Strategy, plant and manage appropriate vegetation to sequester atmospheric carbon and improve urban resilience to a changing climate. However, this should not offset or replace direct reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.
14. By 2030, improve the energy efficiency and climate resilience of buildings and grounds of all public schools, playgrounds and community centres.
15. Advocate in cross-jurisdictional forums for greater ambition in emissions reduction policies and programs, an urgent end to fossil fuel production, consumption and export, and a just transition. Fossil fuel companies must bear contingent liability for climate damage and adaptation.



Photo: Hedda.M

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Canberran residents and visitors traverse the city on millions of trips daily for employment, education, social, recreational, and household activities. Commercial, government and community sector vehicles carry goods and provide many of the services that underpin life in the Territory.

Transport is the ACT's largest source of direct greenhouse gas emissions (more than 60%)¹², primarily through the use of petrol and diesel vehicles. To respond with appropriate urgency to the climate crisis, we must rapidly shift to a zero-carbon transport system through a range of strategies¹³.

¹² Point Advisory, 2022, ACT greenhouse gas inventory for 2021–22, https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2122872/ACT-Greenhouse-Gas-Inventory-Report-2021-22.pdf

¹³ The Synthesis Report of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6-SYR) released in March 2023 warns that emissions "will need to be cut by almost half by 2030, if warming is to be limited to 1.5°C."

Electric vehicles are already replacing fossil fuel vehicles – the ACT has the highest rate of EV uptake in Australia. Whilst privately owned EVs will continue to serve a role, other modes of transport are also beneficial for individuals, businesses, the natural environment and the city as well as the climate. These include active travel (walking, cycling, rolling), electrified public transport and ride-sharing. High-quality infrastructure and programs to support equitable access are essential to a successful zero-carbon transport system. Electrification and a mode shift towards greater use of active travel and public transport are urgently required.



1. Fund and implement an integrated transport strategy for Canberra that prioritises moving people safely, protects the environment, drives down emissions, and maintains liveability and equity of access.
2. Legislate targets for transport outcomes that meet or exceed emissions reduction targets, particularly a target that by 2035, 50% of commuting journeys will be by active and public transport¹⁴.
3. Establish a Ministerial Advisory Council on Transport to advise the government and monitor the implementation of an integrated transport strategy.
4. By 2028, upgrade the existing network and build the missing links, as per Priority Two of the ACT Government's Active Travel Plan, to provide a connected, safe and convenient cycle and active travel network.

¹⁴ As per iMove Australia, 2022, FACTS: A framework for an Australian clean transport strategy, <https://imoveaustralia.com/project/project-outcomes/facts-a-framework-for-an-australian-clean-transport-strategy>

5. Legislate that from 2028 onwards at least 90% (at any time) of cycle lanes, shared paths and footpaths be maintained in good condition and are compliant with anti-discrimination laws. Allocate continuous funding to achieve this ongoing target.
6. Continue and expand the Slower Streets program and implement design changes (in consultation with local residents) that calm suburban streets to support safe active travel and recreation, particularly on streets without paths¹⁵.
7. Fund, as advised by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Transport, community engagement programs that support people to make sustainable transport choices.
8. Offer incentives to purchase bicycles and scooters, both manual and electric, particularly to replace car ownership.
9. Deliver an integrated and electrified light rail and bus network that delivers a frequent and reliable seven-day service, enabling people to rely on public transport for work and personal travel. In particular, accelerate the construction of light rail.
10. Commit to all buses running on 100% renewable energy by 2035.



Photo: Hedda.M

¹⁵ For instance, permanent pedestrian crossings around all schools and local shops, prioritised cycle lanes at all intersections, lower speed limits in busy areas.

11. Implement vehicle registration regulations to preference small, zero-emissions vehicles. From 2028:
 - Ensure that no fossil fuel vehicles will be newly registered.
 - Ensure that no “highly polluting” vehicles that are *already* registered will be re-registered, using a criterion to be determined and progressively strengthened by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Transport, with the target of no fossil fuel vehicle registrations after 2035.¹⁵
 - Implement and progressively strengthen a formula basing registration fees on a combination of vehicle emissions and vehicle weight.
 - Invest in emissions testing equipment and enforce vehicle emissions standards.
 - Consider a scheme to incentivise reducing the number of vehicles registered per household.



12. (a) Require new multi-unit buildings to be constructed with EV charging by 2025. (b) Require the installation of EV charging infrastructure in all existing residential apartments by 2028. Provide advice and financial assistance for owners corporations to enable this.
13. Ensure public charging infrastructure contractual agreements mandate a defined level of charger reliability, and provision for accessibility for drivers with disabilities.
14. By 2025, audit all vehicle policies and fees for equity impacts, and implement programs to empower low-income households to replace fossil fuel vehicles , including incentivising other modes of transport.

¹⁵ Hardman, S, et al, 2021, A perspective on equity in the transition to electric vehicles, MIT Science Policy Review, <https://sciencepolicyreview.org/2021/08/equity-transition-electric-vehicles/> and Greenlining, Electric vehicles for all: an equity toolkit, <https://greenlining.org/electric-vehicles-toolkit/>



Photo: Hedda.M

CLEAN AND HEALTHY WATERWAYS

The ACT is the largest urban centre within the Murray–Darling Basin. The Ngunnawal (Ngunawal), Ngambri, Ngarigo Peoples and acknowledging all other First Nations people with connections to this region, have ongoing deep cultural roots to the water courses and byways of the ACT. Canberra is a river city, with both the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee flowing through the Territory providing the lifeblood to our local biodiversity.

The ACT's rivers, lakes, ponds, wetlands and riparian zones support biodiversity and provide crucial food, refuge and habitat to local wildlife¹⁶. They also enhance health and wellbeing by providing space for residents to socialise and recreate. However, water and riparian assets both regionally and nationally face significant challenges as a result of climate change, altered flow regimes, loss of riparian vegetation, pollution and invasive species¹⁷. In the ACT region this has resulted in increased blue green algae blooms, loss of riparian habitat from development and degradation, invasive species choking our river corridors and pollution of our waterways. Better management of water through our urban landscape, in particular a improving landscape connectivity, slowing and utilising stormwater, and investment in the management of riparian zones, will improve water quality and habitat in our waterways and the catchment.

¹⁶ Office of Sustainability and the Environment, 2022. State of the Lakes and Waterways in the ACT.

¹⁷ Australian Government, 2021. Australia State of the Environment Report 2021



1. Bring remaining unprotected sections of the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee river corridors into the nature reserve system.
2. Further incorporate First Nations practices into management of urban lakes and waterways¹⁸.
3. Expand and increase resourcing for the Murumbung Ranger program.
4. Invest in a new robust monitoring system to frequently collect long-term data on the ecological health of the ACT's waterways and wetlands, and establish new water assessment sites for data collection by the ACT Government. Publish the data for public access.

¹⁸ Office of Sustainability and the Environment, 2022. State of the Lakes and Waterways in the ACT, pp 67-74.

5. Provide secure, ongoing funding to community groups working on catchment management, water quality testing, ecological surveys and public education and engagement. This includes the three catchment groups and Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch.
6. Enforce the Water-sensitive urban design guidelines as compulsory for all urban developments.
7. Resource the Environmental Protection Authority to improve regulation and compliance with sediment and runoff controls on building sites and commercial properties to mitigate stormwater contamination.
8. Commit further funding to continue to progressively upgrade and renaturalise existing major creeks and stormwater channels including Tuggeranong Creek, Weston Creek, Yarralumla Creek, Jerrabomberra Creek, Sullivan's Creek and Ginninderra Creek.



9. Invest in continuing the H20K Program to directly engage with householders and businesses to reduce pollutants entering stormwater drains.
10. Require and enforce developers and business owners to install permeable surfaces on future and existing commercial sites.
11. Set a permeable surfaces target for public space that aligns with achieving the city-wide 30% permeable surfaces target.
12. Ensure gross pollutant traps are frequently maintained to avoid build up of pollutants and the resulting reduced efficiency of the traps.
13. Improve water quality in the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee rivers downstream of Lake Burley Griffin by monitoring the impacts of greenfield development on water quality and report on these impacts and management actions publicly.
14. Continue and expand the Office of Water

Photo: Lutgart Uten

TAKE ACTION

WRITE TO YOUR CANDIDATE:

CONSERVATIONCOUNCIL.ORG.AU/ACT-ELECTION-2024

The Council plays an invaluable advocacy role in ensuring the voices of our community are heard in the development of strong laws in our region. Supporting the Council means we can continue to demand better outcomes for community and nature.

DONATE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK:

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