

# España

The destructive practices of  
Spain's fishing armada

May 2010



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GREENPEACE

Defending Our Oceans

# 01

## Introduction

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With almost 90% of European fish stocks in poor condition, the EU is buying and catching fish from areas far beyond its borders. Instead of making real attempts to save these fish stocks and protect its marine ecosystems from collapse, the EU is focusing more and more of its catch capacity and destructive fishing in distant waters. Even if fishing were halted in 2010, 22% of the stocks are so depleted that they could not recover by 2015.<sup>1</sup>

The EU's combined marine catch is the third largest in the world, totalling around 5.1 million tonnes of fish in 2007 (Eurostat), behind only China and Peru. Spain is the EU's largest fishing nation in terms of catch, tonnage and global reach.

At present, the EU fleet is reportedly capable of catching between two and three times its maximum sustainable yield.<sup>2</sup> Despite attempts to cut the size of fishing fleets and reduce pressure on fish stocks, the EU has increased its catch capacity by an estimated 2% to 4% a year. Spain's fleet is no exception.

The Spanish government has encouraged the development of excessive and destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling, purse seining and longlining. It has supported illegal 'pirate' fishing through fishing subsidies, and seems unwilling or unable to effectively prosecute Spanish companies who fish illegally.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is the EU's main fisheries management instrument. It is currently undergoing a reform process that will produce a new set of objectives, management principles, targets and governance standards for the CFP by 2013. This is a real opportunity to end EU overfishing and protect marine ecosystems from destructive fishing practices.

Under the reform of the CFP, Greenpeace calls on Spain and other EU member states to commit to reduce their excessive fishing fleet capacity, increase the area that is protected as marine reserves to 40% and end destructive and wasteful fishing practices. This may be our last chance to ensure the availability of sustainable fisheries for this and future generations.

Published by

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“The bottom line is that an excessive fishing pressure has eroded away the present and future productivity of the fish stocks”

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *October 2008*,  
Commission Working Document:  
Reflections on further reform of  
the Common Fisheries Policy

## The state of our oceans

Once teeming with life, our seas are being emptied as a result of overfishing. Today's industrialised fishing practices exceed nature's ability to replenish the ocean's fish stocks. Globally, between 75% and 80% of fish stocks are considered depleted, fully or overexploited, or recovering from overexploitation. The situation in Europe is even worse. By the European Commission's own admission, in the case of 88% of European stocks “overfishing is so serious that more fish would be caught if there was less fishing.” Almost 20% of stocks are in such a bad state that scientists advise that there should be no fishing at all.

Experts warn that by fishing down the food web, we have eroded the ocean's ability to cope with and mitigate the consequences of climate change. They recommend that we reduce our exploitation levels of marine fish and other maritime activities in order to improve the resilience of our seas and oceans and ultimately safeguard their role in stabilising the climate. Simply aiming at the sustainable use of sea life is no longer a sufficient management strategy; marine protection has become an insurance policy for an unpredictable future, which will be hotter, stormier and more hostile. Placing large areas of ocean ‘off limits’ is vital to protect marine life, the complexity of which we still do not fully understand.

An aerial photograph of a blue and white fishing vessel on the dark blue ocean. A long, bright yellow rope extends from the vessel across the water's surface, curving and zig-zagging towards the bottom of the frame. The vessel has a white superstructure and is surrounded by dark water. The rope is a prominent feature, stretching from the top right towards the bottom left.

“In summary, the overall performance of the CFP has been poor. In terms of conservation of fish stocks, it is doing worse than the US and the rest of the world”

Michael Sissenwine, fisheries expert,  
in a report commissioned by the European  
Commission on the performance of  
the CFP. Reflections on the  
Common Fisheries Policy,  
July 2007

## Logbook:

# CFP and the Spanish fleet

Despite its many reforms, the CFP has failed to ensure sustainable and profitable fisheries. This is largely the result of political decision-making that favours the short-term, economic interests of the fishing industry over science-based governance and sustainability. It is also a consequence of the fact that EU governments have failed to meet agreed objectives for the protection of marine species and habitats and the establishment of a network of marine reserves. Responsible are the governments of the 27 EU states. The EU's most dominant fishing nation, Spain, is also one of the most politically powerful in terms of influencing fisheries decisions. Spain's government oversees a fishing industry that:

- Controls the largest fishing fleet in the EU in terms of so-called gross tonnage (GT) - a quarter of the EU total, more than twice the size of the entire UK fleet, which is the second largest fleet in the EU, three times the Dutch and more than 10 times the Swedish fleet.
- Receives almost 50% of the EU's fisheries subsidies, four times more than the next largest recipient, Italy, five times more than France and almost 10 times more than the subsidies that the UK received.
- Uses around a quarter of its subsidies to grow and modernise its fleet, which in terms of vessel construction is three times more than all other countries combined.
- Includes a number of notorious (pirate) fishing vessels, some of which fished in prohibited areas, hid catch information and targeted protected fish species.
- Operates some of the largest and most powerful vessels in the world – Spain's 12 largest vessels have a combined gross tonnage that is larger than that of the entire Swedish fishing fleet.

If you were to line up all Spanish fishing vessels, bow to stern, they would stretch for a distance of 123 kilometres. Their reach and destructive impact, however, is global. This report illustrates the scale and impact of the Spanish fleet and reveals that the development of excessive and destructive fishing practices are in fact politically and financially supported by the Spanish government.

## Navigating the planet to catch fish

While most of Spain's catch is taken in the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean and waters off the coast of West Africa, the Spanish fishing armada circumnavigates the planet in pursuit of the most valuable catches of tuna, shark and Patagonian toothfish. As a result, Spanish fishermen are able to haul in the largest profits per tonne of fish of all EU countries. The combined Spanish catch in 2008 was worth around €1.87 billion according to the Spanish ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Although 80% of the Spanish fishing fleet consists of small vessels less than 12 metres in length, Spain also has large and powerful vessels that catch fish far from Spanish waters. Around 400 Spanish vessels are thought to fish outside EU waters for at least 90% of their time, according to a study funded by the European Commission (2008).<sup>4</sup> These vessels make up more than half of the total Spanish gross tonnage and 30% of the fleet's engine power. Their combined tonnage is almost as large as that of the entire UK and Polish fishing fleets together.

Spain's largest vessels also received the bulk of EU fisheries subsidies, which means that a large proportion of the money went to a comparatively small number of high investment operations, instead of being used to support the much larger group of small-scale fishermen, generate employment or promote more environmentally-friendly fishing methods.

### Data from the European Commission 2009

(except for catch figures, which are from Eurostat 2007)

	Spain	EU	% of total EU
Number of vessels	11,254	85,888	13%
Gross tonnages (GT)	451,629	1,854,137	24%
Engine power (kW)	1,005,917	6,822,023	15%
Combined length (km)	123	n/a	n/a
Reported catch (tonnes)	0.74 million	5.1 million	14%

The majority of Spain's large vessels (25 metres or more in length) are bottom trawlers (over 50%), followed by purse seiners (nearly 20%). Purse seiners are used to target highly decimated stocks of large migratory fish, especially tuna. Spain maintains over 20 so-called 'super super seiners', each over 70 metres long, with a combined length of 2.1 kilometres.

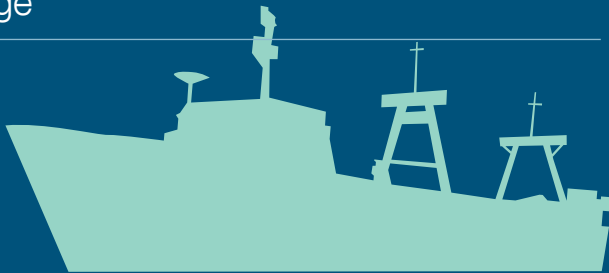
Alarmingly, many of the principal tuna species are at risk due to overfishing. Despite this, Spain and some other EU member states plan to expand their catches, especially in distant fishing grounds such as the Pacific. Pacific Island countries depend on these stocks as a source of income and food, but often stand no chance in competition with the large fishing fleets of distant water fishing nations.

More than half of the EU's ocean-going bottom trawlers are Spanish, representing 21% of all deep-water trawlers that fish in international waters.<sup>5</sup> Spanish trawlers circumnavigate the planet searching for octopus, squid, shrimp, bottom-dwelling fish such as cod and hake, and deep-water species of fish such as redfish. Bottom trawling is among the most indiscriminate and destructive forms of fishing practiced. It destroys sea-floor habitats, including highly vulnerable deep-sea corals, leaving trawled areas almost devoid of life.

Some vessels that are operated by Spanish companies or on their behalf are not actually flagged to Spain and therefore are not taken into account in official counts of the Spanish fleet. However, these fishing operations represent an annual haul of at least 500,000 tonnes.<sup>6</sup>

## Comparison of the size of EU fishing fleets by gross tonnage

**SPAIN**  
(468 035)  
24.3 % of EU



**UNITED KINGDOM**  
(212 609)  
11.1 % of EU



**FRANCE**  
(207 992)  
10.8 % of EU



**ITALY**  
(197 687)  
10.3 % of EU



**THE NETHERLANDS**  
(163 754)  
8.5 % in EU



**PORTUGAL**  
(106 624)  
5.5 % in EU



**GREECE**  
(90 653)  
4.7 % in the EU



**DENMARK**  
(78 069)  
4.1 % in EU



**GERMANY**  
(69 342)  
3.6 % in EU



**SWEDEN**  
(43 497)  
2.3 % in EU

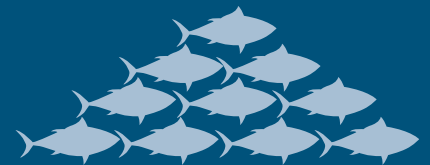


**POLAND**  
(31 241)  
1.6 % in EU



## Comparison of production (catches and aquaculture) by EU member states in tonnes of live weight

**SPAIN**  
(1 005 788)  
15.17 % of EU



**UNITED KINGDOM**  
(787 629)  
11.88 % of EU



**FRANCE**  
(853 669)  
12.88 % of EU



**ITALY**  
(485 625)  
7.33 % of EU



**THE NETHERLANDS**  
(473 985)  
7.15 % in EU



**PORTUGAL**  
(235 875)  
3.56 % in EU



**GREECE**  
(209 869)  
3.17 % in the EU



**DENMARK**  
(209 869)  
13.51 % in EU



**GERMANY**  
(316 721)  
4.78 % in EU



**SWEDEN**  
(276 804)  
4.18 % in EU



**POLAND**  
(158 934)  
2.4 % in EU



# 03

## Pirates in the spotlight

### OPAGAC

(Organización de Productores Asociados de Grandes Atuneros Congeladores de España)

OPAGAC is the largest trade association of Spanish tuna boats and canning factory owners and traders. It operates at least 13 large tuna vessels, with a combined length of more than 1 km. OPAGAC members include tuna giants Albacora SA, Calvopesca and vessels operated by Conservas Garavilla SA.

Albacora SA owns the largest purse seiners in the world - the *Albatun Dos*, *Albatun Tres* and *Albacora Uno*, each between 105 and 116 metres in length. Fishing in the Indian and Pacific Oceans to supply the European market, each ship can catch around 3,000 tonnes of tuna in a single fishing expedition, almost double the entire annual catch of some Pacific Island nations.

In 2007, several OPAGAC vessels were caught fishing illegally or in an unregulated way in the western central Pacific Ocean. OPAGAC intends to further expand its fleet in the Pacific region. To ensure that these plans can be fulfilled, OPAGAC's managing director, Julio Morón, and other staff, have on numerous occasions been invited to attend regional tuna management committees as part of the EU delegation. All 13 vessels in the OPAGAC fleet have received modernisation and construction subsidies from EU and Spanish taxpayers, totalling almost €27 million for the period between 1994 and 2006, over €2 million a year. More than 80% of this money came from the EU. The *Albatun Dos* and *Albatun Tres* each received almost €5 million for their construction and the *Albacora Uno* was built with just over €3.7 million in subsidies.



Spain's largest tuna ships can catch around 3,000 tonnes of tuna in a single fishing expedition, almost double the entire annual catch of some Pacific Island nations





## Grupo Oya Pérez

Grupo Oya Pérez operates trawlers in all of the world's oceans. Some vessels have been caught conducting illegal fishing activities, including fishing for protected stocks and operating in areas off-limits to fishing. The Oya Pérez fleet includes, or has included, some of the most notorious pirate vessels, including the *Lootus II*,<sup>7</sup> which was caught using prohibited fishing gear and cited for repeatedly misreporting its catch while fishing in the Northwest Atlantic;<sup>8</sup> the *Ross*, probably now called *Limpopo*, which was blacklisted by the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) for fishing in prohibited areas in 2003, 2005 and 2007, then flagged to Togo;<sup>9</sup> and the *Garoya Segundo*, flagged to Spain, which was stopped by the Norwegian coast guard in 2005 for illegally fishing Greenland halibut.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the appalling track record of Grupo Oya Pérez, representatives from the company have repeatedly attended annual meetings of the regional organisation that manages stocks in the North-western Atlantic (NAFO) as part of the official EU delegation. On three separate occasions, Greenpeace asked the Spanish government to carry out an investigation into Grupo Oya Pérez's connection to IUU fishing. The government has not responded.

## Antonio Vidal Pego

Another notorious fishing fleet with a global reach is controlled by Antonio Vidal Pego. One of his vessels - the *Viarsa I*,<sup>11</sup> a vessel flagged to Uruguay - fled from Australian, South African and British enforcement authorities in 2003. The chase lasted 21 days, covered a distance of 4,600 nautical miles and ended in the confiscation of 95 tonnes of Patagonian toothfish.

Mr. Vidal Pego has been convicted of illegal fishing,<sup>12</sup> fined<sup>13</sup> and had several vessels he controls blacklisted by national and international authorities.<sup>14</sup> Mr. Vidal's companies often change the names and

flags of their vessels in order to escape prosecution, transfer fish between illegal and legal vessels to obscure the catch origin, and operate out of numerous countries to avoid stricter rules and legislative control.

Despite this, the Spanish government still grants Vidal's companies fishing licenses, subsidises their fishing operations and signs their charter agreements, undermining its own public commitments to combat IUU fishing. For instance, the 2002 construction of the *Galaecia*<sup>15</sup> was subsidised by more than €1.5 million. The Vidal family began operating the *Galaecia* soon after its construction. Two years later, in 2004, Mr. Vidal's business received an additional €1.3 million in subsidies to explore the Patagonian toothfish fishery in the Southern Ocean using the *Galaecia*. Its crew later shifted some of its catch to other vessels in the Vidal fleet, including vessels that had been blacklisted by CCAMLR for illegal fishing (transferring catch to a blacklisted vessel is an offence).

That same year, Vidal was operating at least seven fishing vessels in the Southern Ocean, a number of which had been engaged in well-documented cases of illegal fishing. For instance, the Vidal-owned *Maya V* was apprehended for illegal fishing and was found to have 150 tonnes of Patagonian toothfish onboard, worth more than \$1.5 million.<sup>16</sup> At least two more of Vidal's vessels were caught fishing illegally in the Southern Ocean in 2004 and others were documented offloading toothfish under questionable circumstances.<sup>17 18 19 20</sup>

Greenpeace has been able to verify subsidies of at least €3.63 million since 2003 for the Vidal fleet, and a further €4 million appear to have recently been awarded to a company linked to Mr. Vidal.<sup>21</sup> The total amount could be even larger: the environmental organisation Oceana has recently reported that Vidal's businesses received as much as €10 million in total. Additionally, three companies managed by two relatives of Mr. Vidal Pego – Manuel Vidal Suárez and José Vidal Suárez – are also among the most subsidised companies in Spain, having received at least €5.6 million between 2002 and 2006.

In early 2009, Greenpeace submitted a dossier on Mr. Vidal Pego to the Food and Agriculture Organisation and a criminal court in Spain detailing the various criminal activities conducted by Mr. Vidal Pego and his vessels, and requested an investigation of the company. The matter was referred to the Spanish Fisheries Administration in Madrid, which has yet to respond.

## Fuelling overcapacity with taxpayer money

Spain uses massive amounts of EU and national subsidies to maintain and grow its fishing fleet. Between 2000 and 2006, Spain received almost 50% of the EU's fisheries subsidies. This is four times more than the next largest recipient, Italy. It is also three and a half times the total sum given to the UK, Germany, Denmark and Poland.

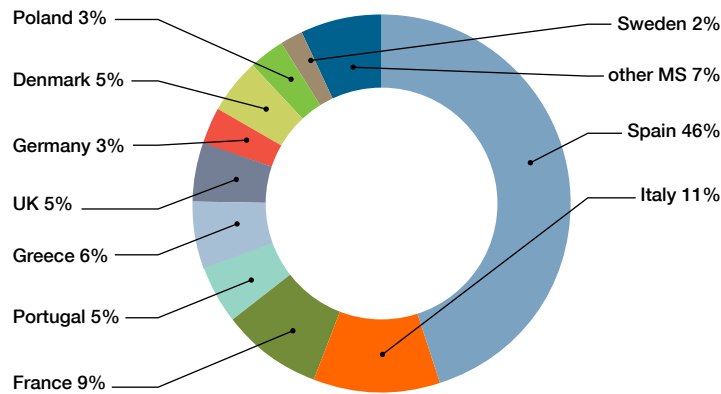


Fig. 1 Share per EU member state of EU fisheries subsidies between 2000 and 2006<sup>22</sup> [www.fishsubsidy.org](http://www.fishsubsidy.org)

In total, Spain and its fishing fleet received nearly €1.6 billion in fisheries subsidies from the EU and issued at least another €630 million in national subsidies between 2000 and 2006.<sup>23</sup> This is equal to about 25% of the value of the total Spanish catch, equivalent to more than €27,000 per fisherman per year. On the other hand, funding for fisheries control measures represents only 6% of the average annual allocation to the sector and only around 2% was spent on the protection or development of fisheries resources. Just a fraction of the 2%, if any, would have been spent on marine conservation measures, such as the protection of marine reserves.

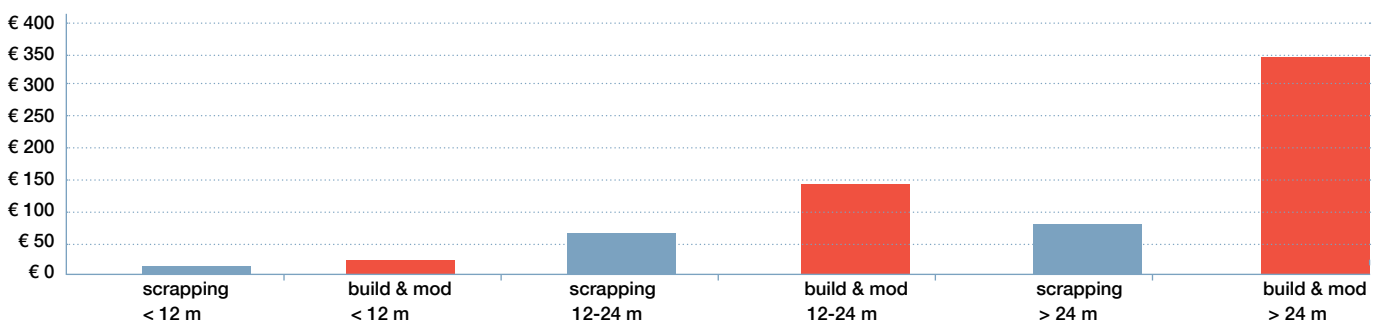
Most of the subsidies received went to fishing operations that have impacts on the environment, such as the construction and modernisation of vessels (47% of all EU subsidies given to Spain), according to a report commissioned by the Pew Environment Group.<sup>24</sup> Spain received three times more subsidies for the construction of new vessels than all other EU member states combined. In addition, some €153 million were spent on the modernisation of vessels, including better power blocks used to haul in nets of the purse seine fleet and stabilising tanks for the long-liner fleet. Both measures reduce down time and therefore improve the fishing capacity of the vessel.

Spain's investments into its ocean-going fishing fleet were made in spite of commitments by the EU to reduce fishing capacity and overexploitation of fish stocks. As early as the 1990s, official assessments of the EU fleet had shown the need for fleet reductions of up to 40%.<sup>25</sup> But attempts to reduce the EU fishing fleet, as part of reforms of the CFP in 1992 and 2002, failed and no concrete fleet reduction targets were set. At the same time, improvements in technology increased the efficiency of fishing operations, and therefore fishing capacity.

In total, 27 Spanish vessels received construction subsidies of more than €1 million each between 2000 and 2006. All of these vessels are larger than 30 metres in length. In fact, only 3 of the 53 vessels that received construction subsidies were smaller than 25 metres in length. In the same period, scrapping funds were approved for approximately 940 vessels. Almost 90% of these were under 25 metres in length.

Effectively, small vessels were decommissioned and replaced by larger vessels using subsidies. In most cases, this has meant that small-scale operations and family businesses lose out to larger fishing enterprises that can afford to make capital-intensive investments, much of which are underwritten by Spanish and EU taxpayers.

### Spain



Source Cappell R, Huntington T and Macfadyen G. (2010). 'FIG 2000-2006 Shadow Evaluation'. Report to the Pew Environment Group.



## Two decades on: all words, no change

“The Common Fisheries Policy has reached a crossroads ... It definitely does not make sense to keep as many fishing vessels as possible, let alone expand the fleet capacity. The time has come to openly recognise that as far as capacity is concerned we have made totally inadequate progress in the last 10 years in bringing capacity and fishing effort into line with the resources. We need to do so now if we truly want to modernise our fishing sector, promote the sustainability of fishing stocks, enhance the income of our fishermen and improve their way of life.”

Speech of EU Fisheries Commissioner, **Franz Fischler**: “Fishing less to secure the future of fisheries” 21 September, 2000

# 05

## Changing course

The Spanish government has promoted the development of a large, ocean-going fishing fleet and failed to support its domestic small-scale fishing sector. Its short-sighted subsidies policies have helped to grow large-scale, capital-intensive, destructive fishing methods.

As the EU's Common Fisheries Policy is being reformed, Spain and the EU will need to reduce their fishing fleets, set aside 40% of EU waters as protected marine reserves, and end destructive and wasteful fishing practices in order to save our seas and give future generations the possibility to catch and eat fish. Scientists argue that fish catches could be 80% higher if the EU managed stocks sustainably.<sup>26</sup> Greenpeace demands that Spain and the EU's other member states include the following in the new Common Fisheries Policy:

- Legally-binding fleet adjustment targets that lead to overall reductions and a shift in fleet structure toward environmentally-sound and socially acceptable fisheries, scrapping overcapacity and destructive fishing practices.
- Rules that require and support the designation and protection of marine reserves as part of regional fisheries management strategies.
- Provisions to promote science-based decision-making, in particular the introduction of a legal cap on Total Allowable Catches at scientifically recommended levels.
- Provisions that promote transparency in data-handling and decision-making, accountability in fisheries policy and management, and traceability of seafood products.





Greenpeace calls on Spain and the EU to:

- Reduce their fishing fleets
- Set aside 40% of EU waters as protected marine reserves
- End destructive and wasteful fishing practices

This is the only way to save our seas and give future generations the possibility to catch and eat fish





## How is fishing capacity measured?

Fishing capacity essentially describes the ability of a fishing vessel or a fleet of vessels to catch fish. The main factors affecting fishing capacity are:

- Vessel characteristics, such as the tonnage and overall holding capacity, engine power, freezing capacity etc.;
- Fishing gear characteristics, which are generally considered in two groups – active gears, in particular trawls, hooks, lines and encircling nets, and passive gears, such as set gillnets and pots;
- Operational characteristics, such as distance to fishing grounds, available fish-finding technology such as sonar, the price of fuel, biology of the species and even the experience of the captain and crew.

Consequently, the measurement of true fishing capacity is almost always a rather complex calculation, combining a range of technical characteristics alongside economic and biological factors. Therefore, gross tonnage and engine power are often used as a rough indicator of fishing capacity.

Another important factor that influences how much a fishing vessel can catch is the time it spends fishing or the number of hooks and size of nets it uses – the so-called fishing effort. To get a full picture of the potential impact of a fishing fleet on the resource, one should therefore take into account the multiple factors affecting real fishing capacity, combined with fishing effort and the number of vessels employed.

Last, but not least, it is also necessary to consider the specific characteristics of the ecosystem and its fragility.

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