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# THE DIRT

Official Newsletter of Southern Dirt

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# (Ex)-Chairman's Report

by Evan Hall, Southern Dirt Vice-Chairman

Hi again everyone, this time it's not Craig. Today Craig asked me if I would like to write one last report (which I'm calling the ex chairman's report) to officially say goodbye to the Southern Dirt membership group. September will mark the end of my 7 or 8 years on the board, of which I've been lucky enough to be Vice Chair or Chair.

So, for my last report I'm not going to pull too many punches and stick with my normal recipe for an update consisting of some thoughts on how the season is shaping up in our membership patch and also what's been happening within the board and staff group of SD.

The season is once again shaping up pretty well for the croppers and ok for the stockers. Dam and stock water is likely to become the biggest issue for large parts of our patch over summer if we do not receive some larger rainfall events between now and then. Pricing for most commodities are going along reasonably well with the exception of perhaps wool. Barley at this stage seems to have weathered the China tarrif saga reasonably well. At the time of writing this report, barley is at \$235 FIS, somewhat above the misely sub \$200t spoken of initially. Obviously it can still fall much further (and is somewhat below pricing of the last couple years) but I think there is lots to be positive about.

Covid is thankfully keeping its grubby snout out of our state thus far in round two and I hope for everyone's sake, it stays like it. In my personal opinion, I think the state government has handled the situation particularly well and I am grateful for the minimal impact on our lives and businesses. Sticking on the covid line.... I would like to resonate Craig's words in one of his previous chair reports and commend Tracey and the team for the excellent info updates she emailed during the thick of things. SD received excellent feedback on these and I would also like to thank the membership for the feedback.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone that I have served with (past and present) on the board and all of the staff members that have been involved during my time here. The skills that I have gained over the 7 or 8 years are largely thanks to these people, and I cannot thank them enough. Although challenging at times, I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure and firmly believe it has been invaluable to me in my professional development. I can only hope that the board, staff and membership have got out of me close to what I have got out of them. I will also jump on the moment to ask the question that if you think you have the time and passion to have a go at position on the board then please contact Craig. It's a great opportunity.

So, for the last time, goodbye and best of luck with the rest of the season.

Evan Hall

# CEO Report

by Tracey Hodgkins, Southern Dirt Chief Executive Officer

Happy spring everybody. It seems that many of our croppers are in for a bumper season with rainfall continuing in much of the Great Southern. We can only hope that the world market keeps Australia forefront in its mind now that China is seemingly intent on dumping our produce. I think a focus on diversifying our markets will see us reduce our reliance on China and other large markets which is not a bad outcome for our future.

Over the past few months Southern Dirt has been busy with our in-field projects assessments and results are very promising. The flax plots are doing well this year and we are hopeful that we will yield over 1.2tonne per hectare with the new varieties that in play. This means that not only will we have a niche product going on the shelves next year but also have the possibility of sending out our flax seed as a commodity grain product. At \$1000 a tonne this could mean we have a great crop to add to our current agronomic systems. To that end we have begun a relationship with a grain specialist marketer whose' focus will be to develop our markets over the next few years. Our assessment to date sees a shortfall of 5000 tonne in the domestic market alone.

Keith Gomez a 3rd year marketing student at Curtin has joined the Southern Dirt team as our intern to work on the flax project until the end of the year. Keith is supervised by Dr Min Teah who has been involved in a number of industry research and consulting projects with domestic and international clients such as Livelynk, Gabriel Chocolate, Simmos Ice Cream, Nash and Lust Pearls, Shiseido, amongst others. Keith will deliver his plan in November and we will have him present either in person or via a video link to our board and members.

The 2021 R and D meeting of the Koji School advisory board, the farm team and Southern Dirt was held on the 25th September. The aim of the meeting was to agree on trials for 2021, with multiple partners coming on board to help us make this a trial site to be proud of in Kojonup. We have interest from many organisations including Axis Technology, who will bring its system to the farm in conjunction with other technology providers. This will be an innovation farm that suits our mixed farming region well. The added benefits of educating the upcoming farmers in our region means a great result for all.

A few weeks ago I visited Wayne Smiths' farm at Narrikup to view his pasture production. We will be putting together a research proposition to build further knowledge on his obviously successful grass growing enterprise. Wayne is very generous with his knowledge and we are sure we can add value with a variety of trials across our region. Let us know if you want to be involved.

I presented to the Lower South West hub of Southern Dirt along with farmer Gary Buller on the development of a SW cooperative that meets the needs of farmers in the region. The coop will be focused on the development of a micro-abattoir and a range of other things tipped to bring down the input prices of SW beef and sheep. Alongside this sits our beef supply chain project which is looking at barriers and solutions to the current downturn in beef production in the south west. The report is due out in December.

# CEO Report

...continued

Spring Field Day was our most recent event on the 13th October, bringing together over 40 farmers and organisations to hear about the latest research and updates in our region. The morning session included topics on fertiliser decision making, effects of Covid-19 on food markets, the HRZ Canola project and managing workforce shortages during a pandemic. Farm tours in the afternoon visited two Southern Dirt projects – Dual Purpose Crops and Non-Wetting Soils, plus a visit to NVTs from AGT Breeding and InterGrain. It was a great opportunity to catch up and network, hear from experts in our region and see some remarkable machinery in the field, which included the Grizzly Tiny and Versatile Delta Track 620. Thank you to everyone involved for making it such a successful day.

In the Peel area we are concentrating on developing a horticultural education facility on the property of Nicola and Shane Keliher. Nicola is head of our Peel innovation committee and their farm aims to be a shining light in the region for innovation. We will be working closely to develop the facility with support from a range of partners. The facility aims to be operational in 2021.

The facilitation and advocacy for value-add facilities continues and we are in talks with a number of partners around developing both the South West and Peel value add hubs. We have been successful in attracting a company to develop a zero waste processing facility that creates a variety of value added products for retail and wholesale. I think 2021 will be the year of the value-add. Let me know if you are interested in developing value-add products from your current production systems and maybe we can help facilitate something for you!

As always Southern Dirt is committed to working with you all to bring your levy's back to the region and help wherever we can. Let us know what else we can do for you.

Cheers all and happy spring!

Tracey Hodgkins



# Webinars

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The GrainGrowers Carbon Calculator webinar raised a lot of questions from those watching about how they work, how does the industry select one as the industry 'standard', and current and future market implications.

You can use this link to watch the recording of the webinar. If you have any questions for the presenters, pass them on and we will get an answer from them. Additionally any feedback and ideas to progress this issue are welcome. Additionally, feel free to distribute this to your members and clients. We need to learn a lot more about carbon emissions in grain production.

<https://www.graingrowers.com.au/policy/webinars/>

**Watch Webinar - Carbon Calculators**

**Watch Webinar - Chain of Responsibility**

**Watch Webinar - National Policy Group Q & A**

**Watch Webinar - Regional Investment Corporation**

**Watch Webinar - COVID-19 & Barley: where to next?**



## Australian food and agriculture may have just passed 'peak China' exposure

Australian exports of food and agricultural products to China rose by eight per cent in value terms in the 2019/20 season, reaching the highest level in the history of the China-Australia trading relationship. But that could well prove to be the peak of Australian agriculture's exposure to China, agribusiness specialist Rabobank said in commentary released today.

## Rabobank

Data released this month showed the biggest gains in Australian agricultural exports to China in 2019/20 were registered by beef and sheepmeat, as Chinese buyers looked to fill the hole left by African swine fever, which more than halved the Chinese sow herd in recent years and created a shortage of animal protein in the local market.

But shipments of dairy, wine, grains and oilseeds and fruit also all saw year-on-year gains, as "Australia continued to ride the wave of opportunity generated by China's rising incomes, the 2015 China Australia free trade agreement, increasingly sophisticated ecommerce supply chains and the value consumers place on Australia's food quality and provenance", the bank said.

However, while there was a surge in shipments to China, the total value of Australia's food and agri (F&A) exports "basically stood still in 2019/20" – with shipments down by just under two per cent.

As a result, China's share of Australian F&A exports rose to 32 per cent for the 2019/20 period – up from 29 per cent in the prior year, and reaching the highest level in the history of the China-Australia trading relationship.

But the recent trajectory of Australian agriculture's increasing exposure to China was not inexorable, the bank said, and 2019/20 could well prove to be the peak of Australian agriculture's exposure to China.

### Market concentration risk

Rabobank head of Food & Agribusiness Research Tim Hunt said "extracting one in three of our export dollars from one market" brought considerable concentration risk for the Australian food and agricultural sector.

"We haven't been this exposed to one market since the 1950s, when we were still joined at the hip to the UK," he said. "And that was a very different political relationship."

Mr Hunt said in a year in which political relations with China had soured, the share of almost all of Australia's agri exports destined for China rose. But trade was now starting to suffer.



"This shouldn't come as a complete surprise," he said. "China has often found reasons to reduce purchase of agri products from countries when tensions arise. And its most senior diplomat in Australia warned over two years ago that if political relations continue to deteriorate, trade could suffer."

Now almost eight months into 2020, this is exactly what we are seeing, Mr Hunt said.

"Australia has five F&A exports to China that can be worth over a billion dollars in any given year. In 2020, China has so far impeded or threatened to impede three of these – via the removal of accreditation to supply some beef product lines from certain abattoirs, the imposition of an anti-dumping duty of barley, and now a threat to impose anti-dumping duties on wine also" he said.

Mr Hunt said yesterday's announcement of a Chinese anti-dumping investigation into Australian wine was cause for significant concern in the sector.

"The investigation may ultimately find that no such dumping has occurred. But these investigations can take more than a year, and the uncertainty it creates can impact trade in the interim, and can undermine investment appetite in the sector."

## Peak China

In its commentary, the bank said 2019/20 may prove to be the peak of Australian agriculture's exposure to China for several reasons.

- Firstly, the likely rebound of wheat production this season will see a huge boost to shipments of a product that is typically sold to markets outside of China.
- Secondly, China's antidumping duty on barley will likely see most barley exports directed elsewhere for at least the next 12 months.
- Meanwhile, with some rebound in the Chinese pig herd underway, the share of Australia's beef and sheepmeat destined for China may also have peaked.
- As we push into the longer term, regions like South-East Asia are also expected to play an increasing role in the textile milling industry, which will eventually see the share of Australian cotton sent to China drop off over the medium term.

But the size of the trade flow will be heavily influenced by the politics between the countries and the strategy of buyers and sellers, Mr Hunt said.

"The extent of exposure to China and the risks this is bringing may see many industries look to diversify markets in coming years," he said.

"The Chinese market is hard to replicate in size, growth and value. But there are growth opportunities in other markets that Australian exporters can tap into in coming years, especially if progress is made in improving market access."

"The Australian F&A industry has been flexible and adept enough to navigate shifts in its customer base over many decades. This may prove to be the start of the next phase in that journey."



# Southern Dirt Spring Field Day 2020

Kojonup Sporting Complex, October 13th

Southern Dirt hosted over 40 people at their Spring Field Day on the 13th October. It was held at Kojonup Sporting Complex in the morning with four keynote speakers.

Wayne Pluske, founder of Laconik, discussed the importance of measuring and reviewing data when making fertiliser decisions, taking into consideration a range of factors. He outlined several changes to farming that allow for decisions to be made using mapping, data collection, variable rate technology, on farm experimentation, sensors and data analysis.

CSIRO researcher, Sam Flottmann, presented updates on the High Rainfall Zone Canola farming systems project, aiming to support growers to increase yield and reduce yield gap. The issues they have found is that Canola grown in the HRZ has a low harvest index and fails to convert biomass into yield. Plant growth regulators and grazing is being trialled to see if they can reduce plant height and make the canopy more compact. Once they harvest, they will be able to see if there are significant differences, so keep an eye out for an update on their results!

Michael Harvey is a dairy analyst for Rabobank and presented virtually from Melbourne. He outlined the impacts of Covid-19 on food markets and discussed how they have already been affected globally and where Australia finds itself economically. He also gave an insight to trends indicating what the future might hold for the agriculture industry.

Our final presenter for the morning – Ley Webster, owner, and developer of 2 Workin Oz, discussed the background of the company and the reasons for its development. She outlined examples of training they can provide to people pursuing work in the agriculture industry and connect trained staff to farmers and organisations around Australia. She touched on the challenges of Covid-19 and how their business changed to cover shortages in certain sectors.

In the afternoon, everyone was invited to three farm tours. Kojonup School Farm was the first site, which is currently hosting the MLA Dual Purpose Crops project. The aim is to find out the differences in profits when comparing pasture and crop fed sheep. The school is partnering with Southern Dirt to host more trials and technologies in the future to allow students to be involved in cutting edge research and innovations in the agriculture industry.

Alana and Georgia from AGT and InterGrain presented on new varieties of barley and wheat at Simon Zachers NVT site. A basic overview of each variety and the yield potentials were discussed, and a field walk allowed attendees to compare the physical features of each of the varieties.

Demonstrations of the Grizzly Tiny, provided by Kojonup Agricultural Supplies and the Versatile Delta Track 620, provided by McIntosh & Son at Theo Cunningham's farm was the final stop. Spring Field Day attendees and local Tambellup farmers were invited to see these machines in action, while Glenn McDonald gave a short talk about the composition of the soil and its non-wetting properties. It was interesting to see how much clay was able to be pulled up by the Grizzly Tiny to mix in with the topsoil, which allows for improved wetting capacity of the soil.

After a productive day, drinks and afternoon tea were enjoyed by all, with very positive feedback from the attendees. Southern Dirt thanks everyone involved, who made this such a successful day.

Head to <https://southerndirt.com.au/spring-field-day/> for videos of all presentations and demonstrations delivered on the day.

## DEMONSTRATIONS ON THEO CUNNINGHAMS FARM



**GRIZZLY TINY - KOJONUP AG  
VERSATILE 620 DELTA TRACK - MCINTOSH & SON**



# Building supply chain resilience through digital transformation

Significant supply chain disruption was caused by COVID-19, requiring leaders to right-size their operations and embrace digital capabilities that protect supply chains against future disruptions as we enter the new reality after COVID-19. Companies from all industries are doubling down on investments in advanced technologies - from blockchain to artificial intelligence (AI), to machine learning and intelligent automation— which has proven to be the lifeblood of the organization.

## Future-proof your supply chains

Good supply chain management is about two things: 1) reducing complexity, and 2) reducing uncertainty.

Implementing new technologies allow a co-existence of digital enablers and humans across the different supply chain processes and activities that can help achieve these two goals:

Automate	Assist	Augment
<p>Lower value-added tasks/processes are automated and the human element removed partially or completely</p> <p><b>Chatbots and Robotic Process Automation (RPA)</b> are examples of current ways to automate repetitive tasks, a step in the process, or the complete process</p>	<p>Across all industries, technologies such as drones, AGVs, and robotics will likely continue to assist in performing routine, high precision or hazardous activities removing humans from harm's way</p> <p>With the continued advancements in technology and convergence of <b>robotics, IoT, and sensors</b>, humans may be removed from the mundane tasks to the higher value-add activities and decision making</p>	<p>Advancement in AI and analytics will lead to Cognitive decision centers, which can collect and analyze internal/external data (big data), and automate routine supply chain activities as well as assist with strategic decisions</p> <p>As these technologies become more integrated into daily processes and decision-making, they will likely change workforce roles/skillsets as well as increase the rate of new technology rollouts and adoption</p>

## Examples

 <b>Customer order creation &amp; invoice error correction</b>	 <b>Warehouse of the future e.g. smart factories</b>	 <b>Cognitive decision centers across the supply chain</b>
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To that end, there are several approaches and technology solutions that can be used to provide precision visibility into supply chains. This enables real-time decision-making and responsiveness - which will likely be critical to how companies monitor and adapt to changes in customer behavior and supply chain variability in the future.

(1Source: Financial Times, China's new normal may be major export after pandemic, 5 May 2020)

For the full article visit: <https://southerndirt.com.au/building-supply-chain-resilience-through-digital-transformation-kpmg/>



# CropCast

with

*Craig White*

**CropCast is a podcast developed to deliver current broadacre agronomic news, product and application know-how and information from Bayer's Market Development Agronomy Team about the latest technologies.**

Produced and hosted by Craig White, Market Development Agronomist at Bayer Crop Science, CropCast is created for everyone with an interest in agriculture. With new episodes available covering critical broadacre crop stages, CropCast is essential listening to keep you up-to-date with what is going on in the world of farming.



Search CropCast or scan  
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the latest episode.



# Peel Hub Report

Hannah Lalor, Project Officer

It is great to be able to get out and visit Peel farmers, food businesses and support services in the region again. We continue to have conversations with our members to allow us to have a good understanding of how Southern Dirt can support innovation, training and progress in the agriculture industry. Growth and change in the region are inevitable, so we must allow our industry to grow and change with the region. Our aim is to support our producers to ensure agriculture in Peel is prosperous for generations to come.

Outlined below are a few of our current projects that we have been able to push forward with over the last few months.

## Wide Open Agriculture Greenhouses



Southern Dirt has been discussing the possibility of acquiring two large greenhouses, which have been used for a trial in the wheatbelt by Wide Open Agriculture. The wheatbelt location wasn't ideal for their project, however Peel is considered to be a great location for the greenhouses, with good water access and an available workforce to run the project.

Our aim is to grow a product such as tomatoes and basil, that is able to be commercially sold and use the income to cover the costs of running and maintaining the greenhouses. We would also like to engage with Peel Youth Services to incorporate a youth training program for disengaged youth to be upskilled in greenhouse agriculture.

We met with Justin Fromm and Kristie Tonkin from Peel Development Commission, who were keen to discuss possible locations of the greenhouses, Liz Prescott and Helen Douglas from Peel Youth Services to help develop ideas around the youth training facility and Tess Slot from Regional Regeneration Alliance, who is assisting in the logistics of relocating the greenhouse infrastructure.

We are currently in the process of arranging a lease at a possible site and applying for funding to relocate and set up the greenhouse project.

## Growers & Makers Markets

Peel farmers markets has been something the local community have been wanting to bring back for a long time. They provide a place for local farmers, producers and makers to reach the local and wider community as well as building good relationships within the community between small business and consumers.

Natalie, from Mataya Eatery in Mandurah has been running a series of market days, incorporating stalls and products from local businesses out the front of their café. She has now decided it is time to ramp it up and turn these markets into a permanent and regular event. The markets will now be running every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month and will be extending to the rooftop of the Mataya Eatery, allowing for more customers, vendors and entertainment.

# Peel Hub Report

Hannah Lalor, Project Officer continued

Tracey and I met with Natalie to discuss where we could help get local producers involved in the markets. Coming from an agricultural background, Natalie is very passionate about supporting local and giving Peel producers the opportunity to sell their goods at a local market.

We have provided details of how to get involved to our network and hope that these markets are able to showcase the amazing produce from the Peel.

The Growers and Makers Markets will be held every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month from 7.30am and located on the roof of Mataya Eatery – 20 Sholl Street, Mandurah. The first markets were held on the 20th September 2020 with a great turn out.

For more information, visit: <https://www.growersmarketpeel.net/>

## Greening Farms – Peel Harvey Catchment Council

Peel Harvey Catchment Council run the Greening Farms Project, which allows their staff to work with farmers to protect, enhance and plant native vegetation on farms across the Peel-Harvey region. Farmer are supported with technical advice, field days, on-farm surveys and on-ground support.

The aim is to improve protection of existing vegetation and utilise innovative management techniques to increase farm biodiversity, productivity and improve soil condition.

We met with Paula Pownall and Gene Turner recently to confirm an agreement to support the Greening Farms project. We will be running workshops that align with the projects outcomes and showcase farmers who are using new technologies or equipment that improves the management of their land. Our first planned event for the Greening Farms project is a soil workshop, focusing on soil improvement, soil productivity and soil conditioning. More information will be sent out via our e-news updates about this event.

If you have been using a piece of equipment or new technology that has helped you to improve your land management, please contact me at [hannah@southerndirt.com.au](mailto:hannah@southerndirt.com.au) and we can include you in our case studies.



# Peel Hub Report

Hannah Lalor, Project Officer continued

## Agri-Innovation Precinct

Tracey and I recently visited the Agri Innovation Precinct in Nambeelup, which will house infrastructure to assist farmers with new innovations and value add opportunities. Currently groundworks are being completed; however the Shire of Murray aim for the buildings to be completed and up and running by mid-2022.

This precinct aims to provide infrastructure, such as packaging and processing facilities, available for use by our local producers, test kitchens and research facilities to assist with testing new products and cutting edge technology that will allow for unique value add opportunities.

It is an exciting venture for the Peel region and we look forward to see the Agri Innovation Precinct assist our farmers to get the most value out of their produce.



## Innovation Committee

Southern Dirt's purpose is to support landowners, businesses and services in our regions to grow and develop to allow our farming communities to be sustainable and prosperous. Innovation is integral to the growth of these communities and this is the reason why we have introduced a new Innovation Committee.



I have been speaking with Nicola Kelliher from Wandering Clover Fed Beef for the past few months, getting updates on her project ideas and technologies she is looking into with her husband, Shane for their farms in Meelon, Ravenswood and Wandering. One of the key themes of our conversations is how important it was to implement new innovations and technologies that are backed up by science and allow for monitoring in a scientific way. If set up correctly, the data will speak for itself and once analysed can be used to learn from and teach others.

With her forward-thinking attitude and interest in new innovations, Tracey and I invited Nicola to lead our Innovation Committee and to be involved in our Peel Hub Committee. We would like to thank her for her contribution already and look forward to seeing new ideas, education and support being provided to our members through this committee.

*If you would like contact me to discuss project ideas for the Peel region, please feel free to phone (0401 398 700) or email ([hannah@southerndirt.com.au](mailto:hannah@southerndirt.com.au)).*

# Peel Member Spotlight

Wandering Clover Fed Beef

## Wandering family is looking to pivot the market



Shane and Nicola Kelliher are planning for the future with their four children in mind. They want to invest in new innovative practices to ensure their farming business is sustainable, environmentally sound, and able to produce the tastiest, ethically raised beef on the market well into the future.

Shane's father and uncle purchased their farms in Meelon and Ravenswood over 70 years ago and have always had a focus on producing beef. Their focus now is specifically on Clover Fed™ beef, which has been found to have increased omega 3s, as well as providing a tender and tasty product.

Their latest project is to investigate the use of pivot irrigation systems on their properties in Meelon and Ravenswood, incorporating foliar fertilisation of their pasture via the pivot system. Their project aims to reduce fertiliser inputs and run off, increasing pasture productivity while at the same time improving environmental outcomes.

Alongside the irrigation system, Nicola and Shane are looking to use virtual fencing and cell graze throughout the year under the pivots. This would allow more cattle to be grazed naturally, and eventually be the first supplier of 52 week a year pasture beef for consumers – one of the missing links in the WA beef supply chain.

The Kelliher family are great supporters of the paddock to plate approach and hope their pilot project can bring economic growth and sustainability to the Peel. Shane is very particular about the selection of breeding stock and monitors which bloodlines are producing the best temperament, feed conversion efficient, and most profitable beef each season. Nicola's marketing and business background allows for engagement with local businesses, organising deliveries and building relationships with food businesses wanting to showcase Wandering Clover Fed Beef on their menus.

We have invited Nicola to be a Peel Hub committee member and lead a new Innovation Committee, which will investigate and showcase new technologies available to farmers in our region.



# Dry Season Survey 2020



A Waste Authority Program

Rainfall in agricultural areas of Western Australia has been below average with many areas receiving inadequate winter rain to fill on-farm supplies and community dams. Completing this survey about your agricultural water demands will help us manage emergency livestock water and community water supplies for the coming summer months. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

Click the link to complete the survey online.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/dryseasonsurvey2020>

Tracy Calvert  
Manager Rural Water Planning - Department of Water and Environmental Regulation  
Ph: 9841 0100  
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# GROWERS & MAKERS

MARKET. PEEL.

EVERY 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY



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[www.growersmarketpeel.net](http://www.growersmarketpeel.net) Hosted by *Matteo*

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