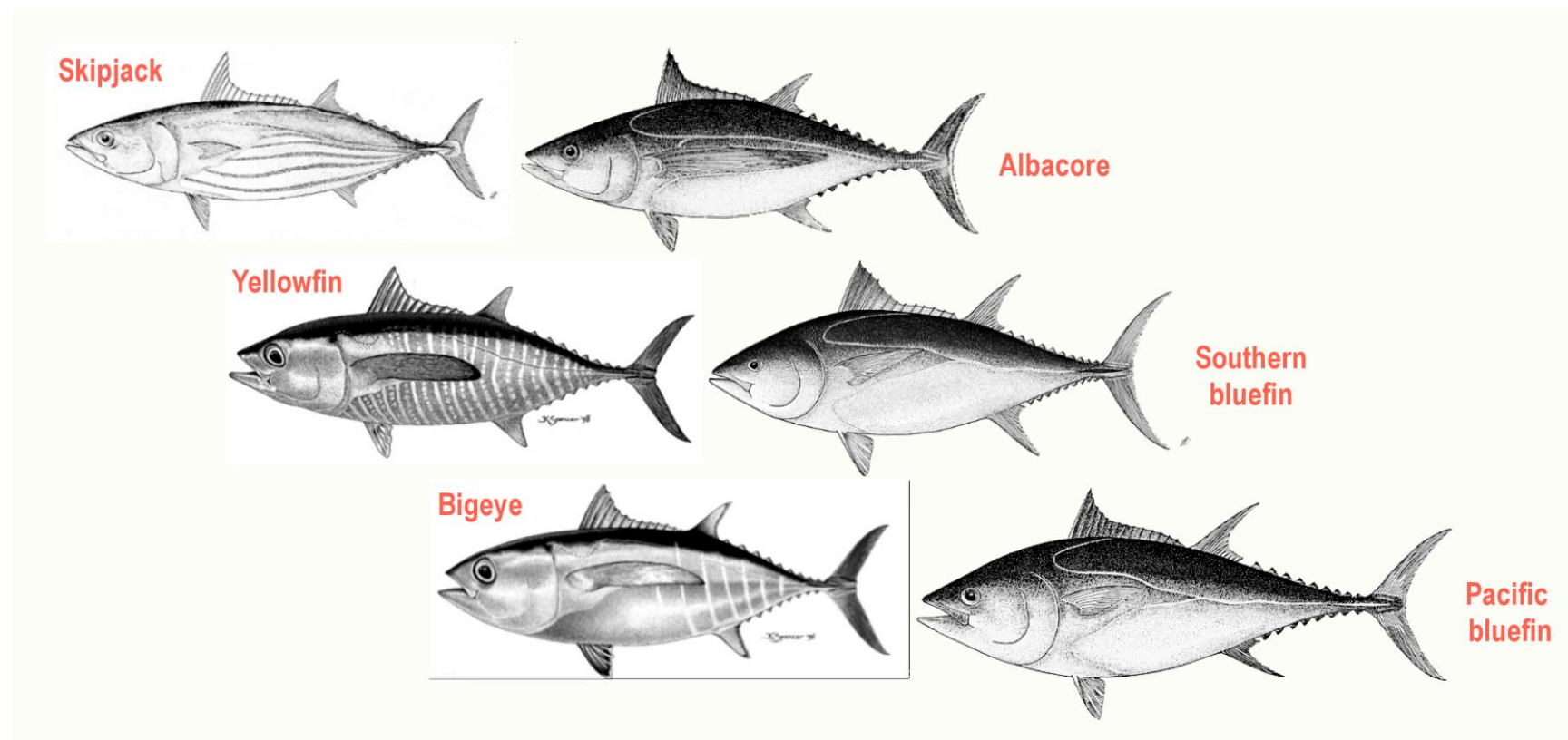


## ID guide to juvenile and small tunas for New Zealand

This guide was created to assist recreational fishers and fishing clubs in identifying species of tuna that are less than 30 kg using external features of freshly caught fish. The range of juvenile tunas has been increasing and some recreational fishers may catch these for the first time. There is a recreational bag limit of one southern bluefin tuna per person per day and the need for fast identification and live release is increasing.

This guide was produced for Fisheries New Zealand project STN2021/02. You can record your tuna catch at [fishcatch.co.nz](https://fishcatch.co.nz)

Juvenile and small tunas, images from FAO

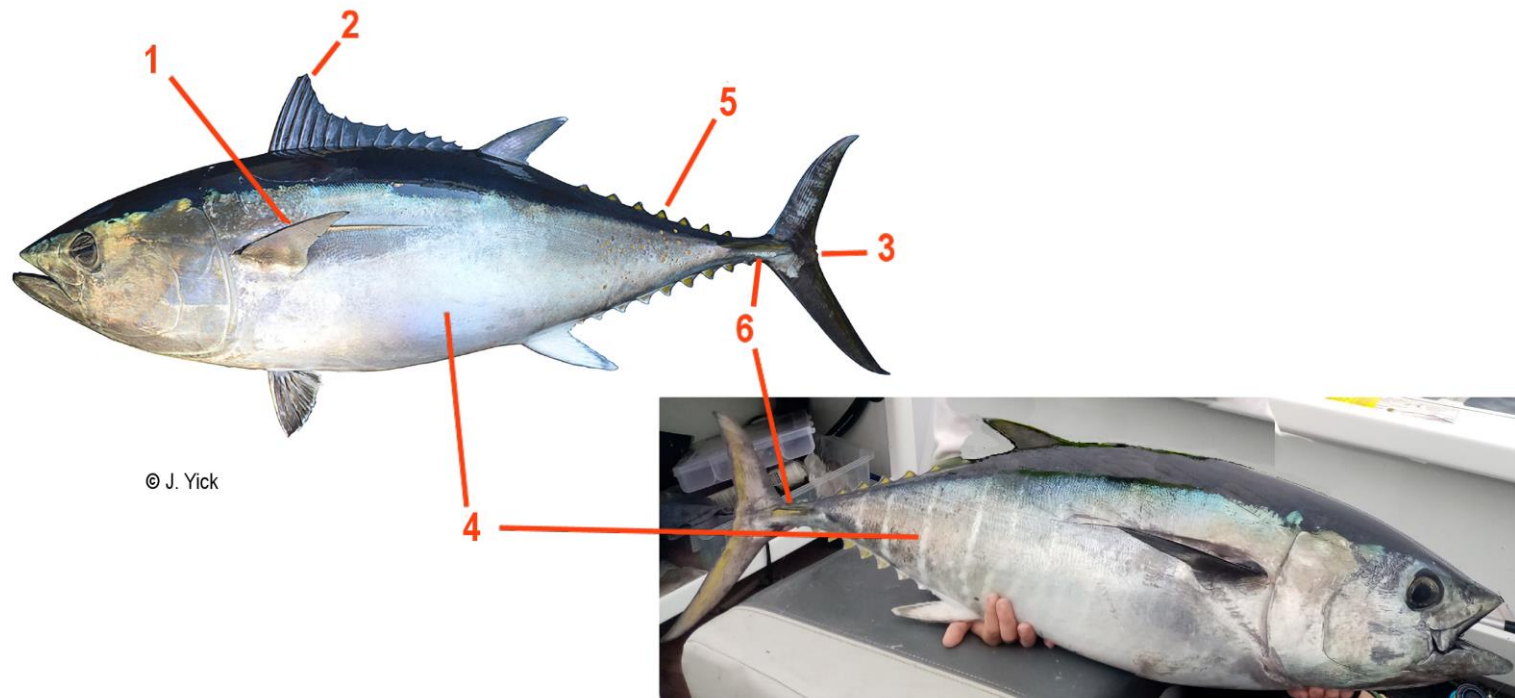


## Juvenile southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*)



Pectoral fins (1) short, less than head length; first dorsal fin (2) slightly longer than second dorsal fin; slight notch in central portion of trailing edge of tail (3). In New Zealand they weigh from 10 kg to 170 kg, with ages from 2 years to 30 years old.

Coloration: dark blue back transitioning into lighter blue; lower sides and belly (4) mainly silver, faint vertical lines or dots fading on death; dorsal finlets (5) bright yellow edged in black; caudal keel (6) pale or yellow but may be darker in large fish; tail may have some yellow fading when dead. In New Zealand, juveniles mainly off the south west coast in summer and larger fish further north in autumn and winter.

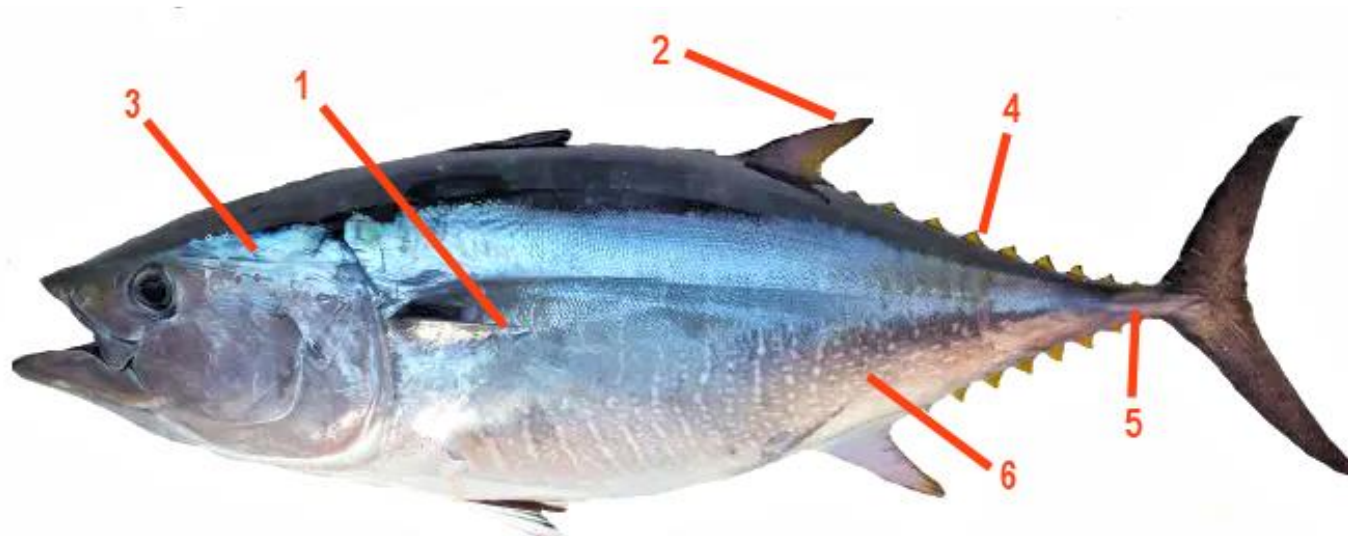


## Juvenile Pacific bluefin tuna (*Thunnus orientalis*)



Pectoral fins (1) short, less than head length; second dorsal fin (2) as high as the first dorsal fin; top front of the body cavity has a small narrow bulge (when gills and gut removed). New Zealand's largest growing tuna attaining over 300 cm fork length and 400 kg weight, but adults and juveniles are not common. Mainly a North Pacific species.

Coloration: dark blue back transitioning into lighter blue with dark fins; may have spots on the head (3); second dorsal fin (2) dark or reddish-brown; finlets (4) dusky yellow, edged in black; caudal keel (5) dark; lower sides (6) and belly silver with consistent spots and faint vertical lines.





## Juvenile yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*)

Pectoral fins (1) moderately long, reaching back to below the second dorsal fin (2) but not beyond; bright yellow finlets (3); a distinct notch in central portion of trailing edge of tail (4); second dorsal fin and anal fins may be long in large fish. Mainly 60 to 120 cm fork length in New Zealand. Yellowfin less than 60cm have shorter pectoral fins with rounded tips but are rare in New Zealand.

Coloration: black/dark blue back transitioning into metallic blue and sometimes a yellow stripe; fins often yellow; sides (5) and belly silver often with more than 10 evenly spaced vertical rows of small white spots, fading on death.

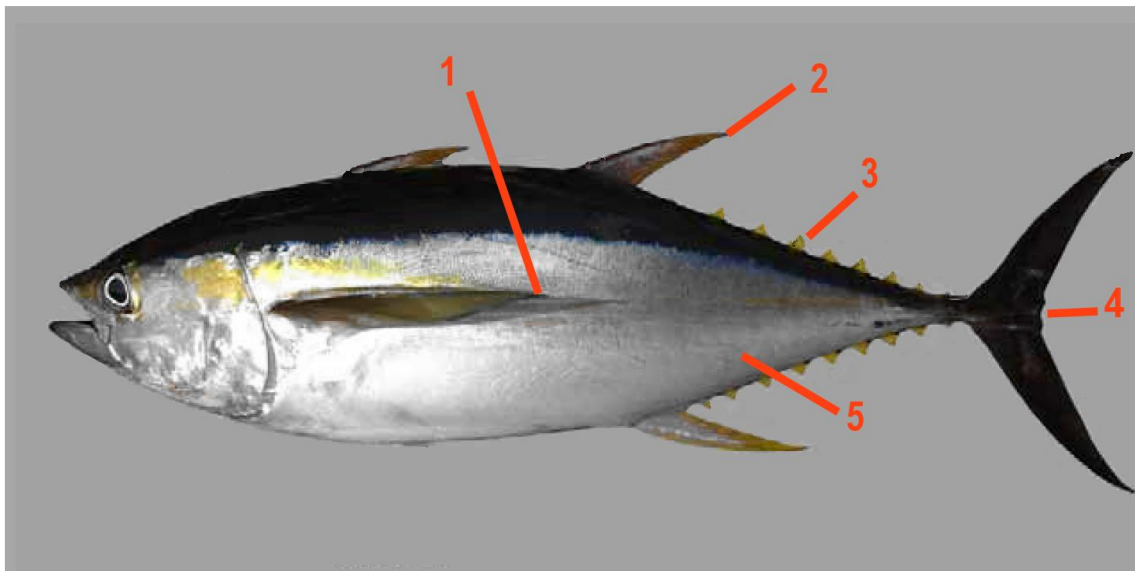


Image credit NIWA



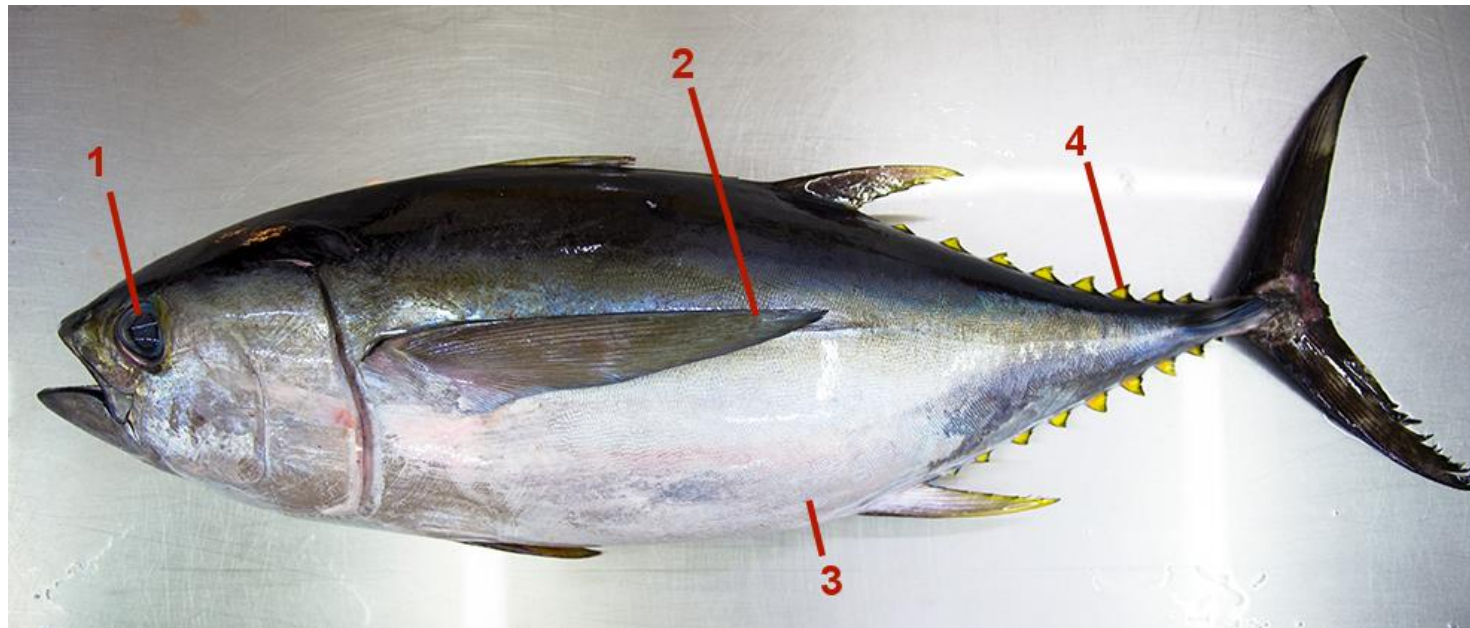


## Juvenile bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*)



Eyes (1) large and elliptical; pectoral fins (2) moderately long, reaching to the back of the second dorsal fin, may be shorter in large fish. Deep bodied tuna with wide girth (3) back to the anal fin; no notch in central portion of trailing edge of tail. Fish smaller than 70 cm fork length with shorter, bendy pectoral fins seldom seen in New Zealand. Can attain 250 cm fork length and 195 kg weight.

Coloration: dark blue back transitioning through iridescent blue to yellow, may have irregular vertical rows of dots or lines on belly (3) fading on death; finlets (4) yellow, edged with black.

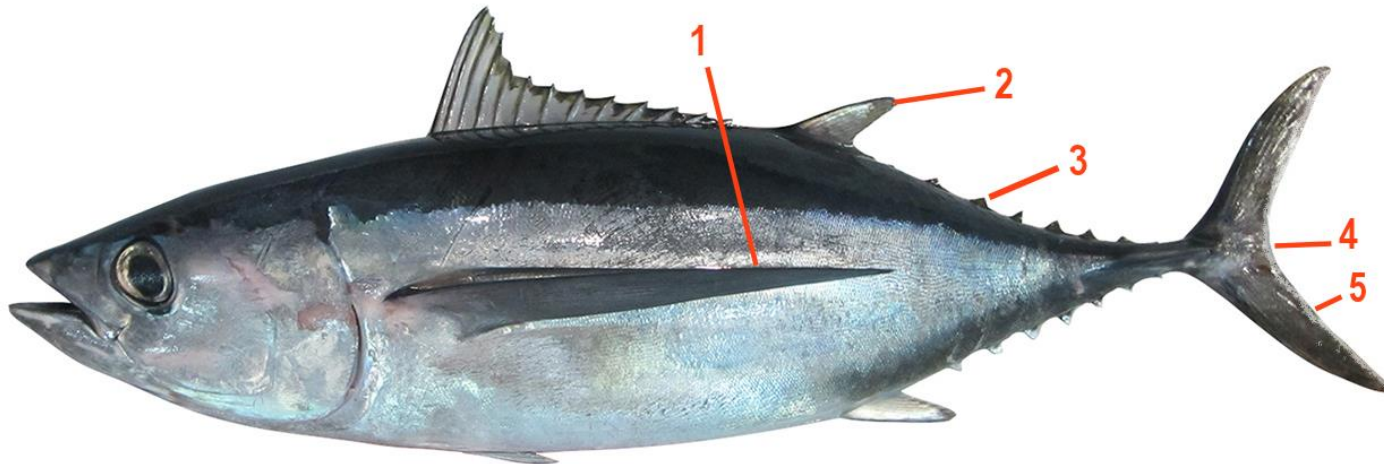


## Albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*)



Pectoral fins (1) very long, reaching past the second dorsal fin in fish more than 50 cm fork length; second dorsal fin (2) distinctly shorter than the first dorsal fin; finlets (3) dark; no notch in central portion of trailing edge of tail (4). Mainly 50 to 80 cm fork length in New Zealand.

Coloration: dark metallic blue back and silver white lower sides and belly; no spots or markings; narrow white trailing edge on the tail (5).



## Skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)



Short pectoral fins (1); first dorsal fin (2) much higher than second dorsal fin; scales on corset and lateral line only (3); no notch in central portion of trailing edge of tail (4). Mostly 45 to 70 cm fork length in New Zealand.

Coloration: dark purple, blue back; lower sides and belly silver white; 4 to 6 dark, longitudinal stripes along lower side and belly (5); multi coloured sheen across body, fades when dead.

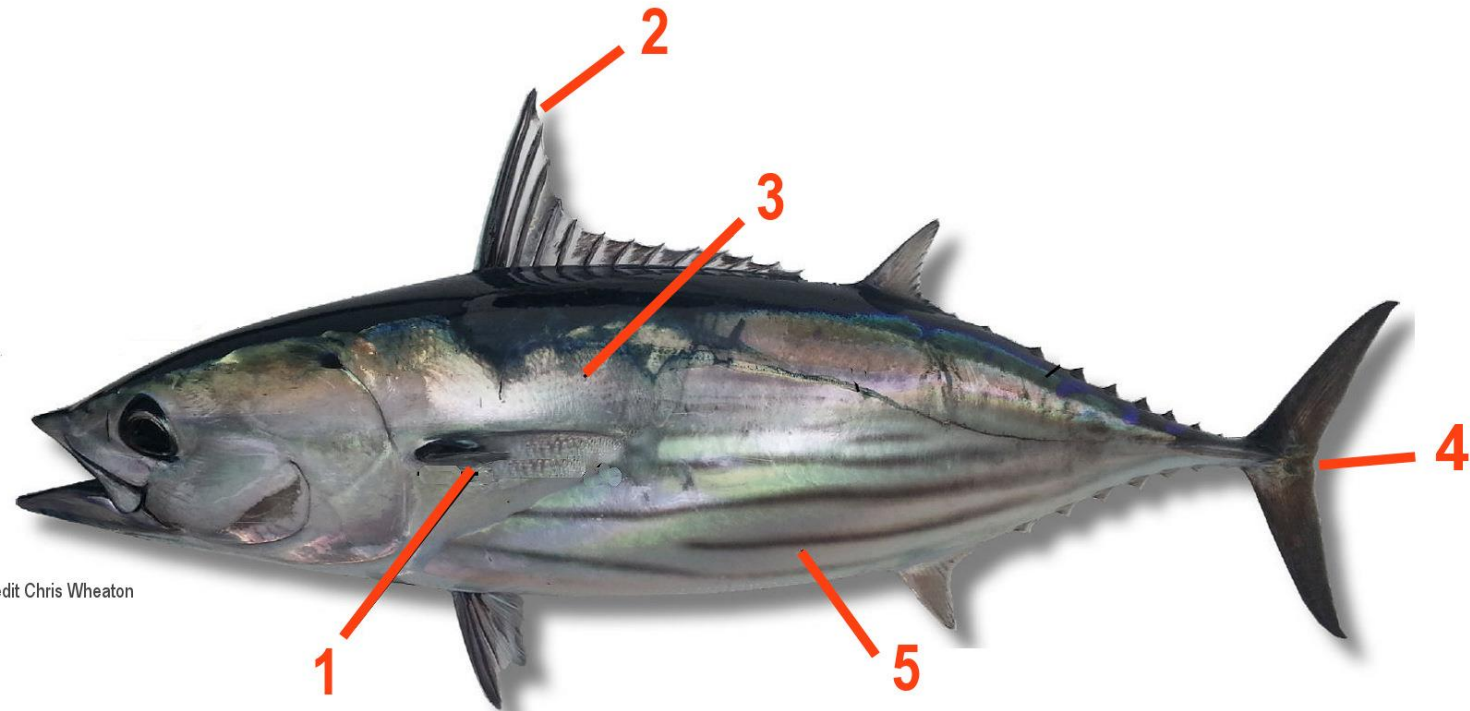


Image credit  
Chris Weaton

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