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ATLANTIC, OUTERMOST REGIONS AND ARCTIC  
**FISHERIES CONSERVATION AND CONTROL ATLANTIC AND OUTERMOST REGIONS**

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**REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING WITH RACS  
 ON EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF MULTIANNUAL PLANS,  
 17-18 MAY 2010**

The objective of the current meeting was to consult the RACs concerned on the progress made with the STECF regarding the evaluation of the three plans and the methodology proposed for impact assessment. This note summarises meeting and list the conclusions.

**1. BACKGROUND**

The first multiannual plans (recovery and management plans) are coming to their third or fourth years and should now be evaluated by the STECF. For some of them a report should even be presented to the Council and the Parliament. Further to this evaluation, the plans could, and will for most of them, be reviewed. Then an impact assessment should be developed before a revised plan is proposed to the Council and the Parliament.

Carrying out evaluation and impact assessment is quite a huge task, and require mobilising multiple expertises in a coordinated way. To this end, conservation units – A2/C2/E2- proposed in spring 2009 to develop a working methodology for evaluation and impact assessment. The objective was that STECF will coordinate the work and that the procedure will be open to stakeholders, the whole procedure being under the supervision of DG MARE. Three multiannual plans to be evaluated in 2009-2010 have been selected as test cases: sole and plaice in the North Sea, sole in the Bay of Biscay and sole in the Western Channel.

**2. EVALUATION OF THE PLANS**

The results of the evaluation of the three plans have been presented to the participants; the presentation is enclosed. Participants discussed the conclusions; the plan specific conclusions are exposed in the Annex.

**2.1. Methodology and stakeholders participation**

The methodology proposed is endorsed.

Participants from RACs welcomed the idea to take part in the process and recognised the need for a more in depth and structured involvement. Participation of the national authorities is also called for, national authorities being concerned by both data collection and by aspects of enforcement.

To ensure appropriate involvement of RAC and national authorities, participants proposed to have a scoping meeting organised also for the evaluation process. The scoping meeting will help identifying the data needed, target the key problem and collect appropriate qualitative information.

RACs also mentioned the need for RAC to develop the appropriate expertise. They finally asked for improvement of the planning of work, long ahead. A planning has finally been endorsed (see conclusions).

## **2.2. Report**

The conclusions of the report (SG-MOS 10-01) have been agreed by participants provided that some comments may complete the report, in particular with regard to decommissioning scheme. Additional elements provided by participants confirm the observation made

### ***(1) Utility and sustainability***

In the current cases a three years implementation does not allow for an in depth evaluation of the utility and sustainability of the plan. It was however possible to draw the following conclusions:

- (a) The plans contributed to the efforts made in reaching MSY in 2015. As far as biological utility is concerned the period of evaluation is too short to be able to show the efficiency of the measures established.
- (b) From a general economic perspective, North Sea sole and plaice and Bay of Biscay sole plans have contributed to less variability in fishing opportunities by giving a margin of variation of +/- 15%.
- (c) This reduction in variability has not been achieved for Western Channel sole due to the difficulties in stock estimation that led to proposing huge variation in TACs.
- (d) On an operational level, it is clear that fuel prices and market dynamic have a strong influence on economic profitability. The market reaction has strongly impeded the economic efficiency of the plans in the case of North Sea sole and plaice in particular. The key aspect being that if the price for sole is relatively stable (on a regional basis), the market demand has turned to small size fish. The phenomenon is even more remarkable for plaice where large plaice are difficult to sell. This supports the idea that the strategy developed by the plans should be based both on the market trends and on the driving fishing strategy.
- (e) Other factors, sometimes prior to the plans or operated in parallel to the multiannual plans can have affected their efficiency. In the case of Western channel sole and North Sea sole and plaice, decommissioning schemes have taken place, either before the plan enters into force (North Sea sole and plaice) or during the enforcement of the plan (Western channel sole). Representatives of the RACs consider this as having had an essential impact on the efficiency of the plan and should be mentioned.

- (f) For Western Channel sole, STECF has had serious difficulties in evaluating the plan for two reasons. First, because of the difficulties encountered in evaluating the stock due to the lack of long time series. Second because the effort control regime described in the plan is very complicated and did not allow STECF to make an evaluation of it. Then even though STECF succeeded in determining the global level of effort, the plan itself does not allow for this calculation. Data should have been extracted from the effort regime declared under the cod plan, however it is nearly impossible to know what has been declared and not.

## **(2) Objectives**

Even though the global objective of the plans is to ensure long term sustainability of the fishery concerned, the specific and operational objectives of the plans concerned are not always clear.

The absence of specific economic objectives in the plans

- impeded a comprehensive economic evaluation.
- Shortage of economic data prevented STECF comparison of observed outcomes with projections of impact assessment of North Sea sole and plaice;
- Plans were only compared with an alternative management approach based on the Commission's annual policy documents.

Objectives should be defined as from the outset, i.e. when the plan is developed.

Fishing mortality rate (F) reveals as being usually more useful as objective than biomass levels(SSB).

## **(3) Understanding of the plans**

There seems sometimes to be confusion between the tools and objectives proposed by the plans (F, SSB, effort), such as in the case of Western Channel sole. This underlines the need to explain the objective and to involve stakeholders as from the beginning.

## **(4) Enlarging the scope of multiannual plans**

RAC's demand for enlargement of the scope of the multiannual plans to social and economic objectives has been confirmed during the meeting.

Multiannual plans could in particular be used for proposing economic and social strategies. Such a case, the objectives should be monitored through indicators with incremented targets so as to allow for progress to be measured.

### 2.3. Plan specific aspects

#### (1) *Sole and Plaice North sea*

##### (a) Conclusions

- Utility and sustainability: There are explicit long term objectives for exploitation consistent with the CFP that would not be so clear without the plan. There are explicit tactical rules for transition to the long term exploitation objectives of the plan, which make the implementation of change more predictable (or less variable) for participants. Where effort regulation is coupled to changes in TAC, there is improved consistency between fishing effort and catching opportunities.
- Regarding removals: TACs appear to have been the more restrictive element for sole. The effort component of the plan does not appear to have been restrictive up to and including 2008. In practice the TACs that have been set for plaice under the multi-annual plan are similar to those that would have been set under the Commissions TACs policy document (2009/224) (+/-15% limit to annual changes in TAC). For sole the TAC likely to have been set without the multi-annual plan would have been slightly higher resulting as a much lower TAC being set in 2010 under the Commissions TACs policy document (2009/224). The plan contains a maximum 15% constraint in annual quota change (increase or decrease) as the basic economic instrument.
- Success in achieving its stated objectives: The stocks of plaice and sole are closer to the long term objectives than they were at the beginning of the plan.
- Regarding most important elements of the plan: Targets for exploitation are preferable to biomass targets to achieve biological sustainability. Long term targets combined with annual rules provide a useful basis for annual decision making on exploitation rates. Constraints on annual change in TAC are expected to be important for obtaining economic stability. This is expected also to improve acceptability to policy makers and stakeholders and therefore implementation.
- Regarding elements of the plan that require revision: The long term targets for plaice and sole need to be checked and evaluated for compatibility. There is potential for spatial management of a component of the plaice fishery separately from a mixed sole and plaice fishery.

##### (b) Discussion

- Even though sole and plaice looks at a common fishery, RACs participants highlighted the fact that landings are nearly mono-species, and markets are strongly different.
- The management system in place in the NL is based on a common share of the effort, but TACs are managed via ITQ system. As a consequence fishermen could sell their vessel but keep their quota and sell it, in other terms, ITQ could then be as the driving force of the plan.
- The plan has had a positive impact on plaice SSB which has reached the objective of 140,000 T. As far as sole is concerned, market changes have led to decreasing the

interest for sole fishery, and the quota for sole is usually not fully used. However sole stay the economic driver of the fishery.

- In the case of sole and plaice in the North Sea and sole in Western channel, decommissioning schemes have taken place, either before the plan enters into force (sole and plaice) or during the enforcement of the plan (Western channel sole). Representative of the RACs consider this as having had an essential impact on the efficiency of the plan and should be mentioned. At least in the case of sole and plaice, it seems that by decreasing the size of the fleet before the implementation of the plan, the decommissioning scheme has participated in decreasing fishing mortality and opened the way for the adoptions of measures softer than would have been expected if the fleet would have kept the original size.
- The market has changed during the last years and consumers are now looking for small fish, at a lower price. As a consequence the fishery is now targeting small fish instead of larger one. This could have contributed to lessening the efficiency of the plan.
- This also tends to prove the necessity to understand the driving force of a fishery in defining the strategy of a multiannual plan.

## (2) *Sole Western Channel*

### (a) STECF conclusions

- Utility and sustainability: Provided an explicit long term objective consistent with the CFP that would not be so clear without the plan. A maximum +/-15% constraint in annual quota change as the basic economic instrument.
- Success in achieving its stated objectives: As an assessment is currently not available it is not currently possible to identify whether changes have occurred. But trend indicators suggest progress.
- Regarding specific indicators those currently proposed do not provide sufficiently for some aspects that are important to some stakeholders. There is a need to consult with the stakeholders to see if some additional indicators are necessary and if so identify with them the provision of the necessary data.
- Regarding elements of the plan that require revision: It is very important to add a clause describing what to do if the assessment is no-longer accepted.

### (b) Discussion

As for North Sea sole and plaice, a decommissioning scheme has been implemented that led to decreasing the size of the fleet by 21%. The free capacity has then been redistributed. There seems to be a lot of anger against this decommissioning plan, judged useless for the profession because based on a wrong assessment of the fleet.

Measuring the fishing activity based on the number of days at sea does not seem to be appropriate. The effort could have decreased, however it is difficult to understand to which extent. At this time STECF has been able to extract some effort data and propose a figure, but the plan itself does not allow for a proper measurement. Moreover it is not possible at this stage to know which level of effort has been affected to the cod plan.

This plan reveals far too difficult to evaluate, due to a lack of data. On top of the remarks already inserted below, RACs stressed their difficulties with the baseline for F proposed by the plan itself. It seems that this judged inappropriate baseline level of F added to a great variability of the TAC has led to a strong opposition of the sector to this multiannual plan.

The difficulties encountered with the plan and the huge variability of the TAC set could have participated to the fact that the beam trawl fishery is now switching to dredging for scallops. This change in the fishery is quite a significant social impact. Vessels fishing for both sole and scallops, it is impossible to know if the profitability margin is due to one or the other activity.

Three other aspects have been discussed, that deserve to be taken into account in reviewing the plan have been mentioned. First the fact that the sole fishery mixed with plaice. As a consequence some proposed to develop two plans (UK), while other have a preference for only one based on the fact that the fishery is exploited by one metier (BE, and scientist). At this stage fishermen are showing an interest for a better selectivity and CEFAS has set up a pilot project to this aim, the question is therefore how to integrate the results of the project in the revision process as timings are different. The second topic concerns the fact that the fishery is now calling for a MSC certification.

### (3) *Sole Bay of Biscay*

#### (a) STECF conclusions

- Utility and sustainability: There are explicit tactical rules for transition to safe biological limits which is the first objectives of the plan; implementation of change more predictable. TACs that have been set under the multi-annual plan less variable than otherwise; the average would have been similar. TAC appears to have been restrictive.
- Success of the plan: The stock of Bay of Biscay sole is now estimated to be inside safe biological limits, the objective of stage 1 of the plan. In the absence of the plan the stock would not have reached safe biological limits until 2009, two years later.
- Medium term simulations indicate that reducing target F in steps of 10% from 2009 will result in reaching a target fishing mortality of Fmax in 2014. An alternative fixed TAC strategy (TAC=4 200 T) would deliver a similar result with a 50% probability conditional on full compliance and recruitment similar that that observed in the past.
- Regarding the most important elements of the plan: Targets for exploitation are preferable to biomass targets to achieve biological sustainability. Long term targets combined with annual rules provide a useful basis for annual decision making on exploitation rates. Constraints on annual change in TAC are expected to be important for obtaining economic stability.
- Regarding specific indicators: those currently proposed do not provide sufficiently for some aspects that are important to some stakeholders. There is a need to consult with the stakeholders to see if some additional indicators are necessary and if so identify with them the provision of the necessary data.

- Regarding elements of the plan that require revision: A clause concerning what to do if the assessment is no longer accepted is required. Currently there is no long term target for stage 2 of this multiannual plan. As multi-annual is now expected to be carried out under stage 2 there is an urgent need to select an appropriate target.  $F_{max}$  appears to be a plausible  $F_{msy}$  fishing mortality target.

(b) Discussion

The plan has reached its goal as soon as 2008. The STECF considered that the plan was not as useful as expected.

One of the basic tools use by the plan was to freeze the fishing capacity. However, the fishery is exploited by two different metiers, and the limit has been fixed whatever the metier concerned. Furthermore, the capacity has been frozen by limiting the number of special fishing permits allocated to vessels. However, in France the obligation to have a SFP has been applied only to more than 10m vessels, while vessels of less than 10 m were allowed to target sole without a Special Fishing Permit. Under these conditions it is difficult to consider that the capacity has been frozen and to estimate the true fishing capacity.

In the absence of social and economic targets, it is difficult to measure the impacts. Fuel prices have been the main driver of the fishery strategy.

#### **2.4. Need for data**

The exact nature of data needed and the disaggregation level clearly depends on the plans evaluated. When data necessary are to fall out of the scope of the Data Collection Framework – such as additional disaggregation-, then additional work will be necessary.

Biological and stock data are usually available. However it should be noted that a history of misreporting could strongly impede the quality of the data, and therefore lead to the impossibility to accurately evaluate a stock. This is certainly one of the key reason for the instability of the TAC for western Channel sole, and therefore the failure of the plan.

The lack of economic data has been one the main difficulties faced by STECF during the evaluation. During discussion it however appears that a lot of data are available, but the problem is to know where they are and how to access it. This has led to setting up a scoping meeting within the framework of evaluation.

Market data (price and evolution of prices, analysis of the market) are essential because market is a key element in economic profitability for the fishermen.

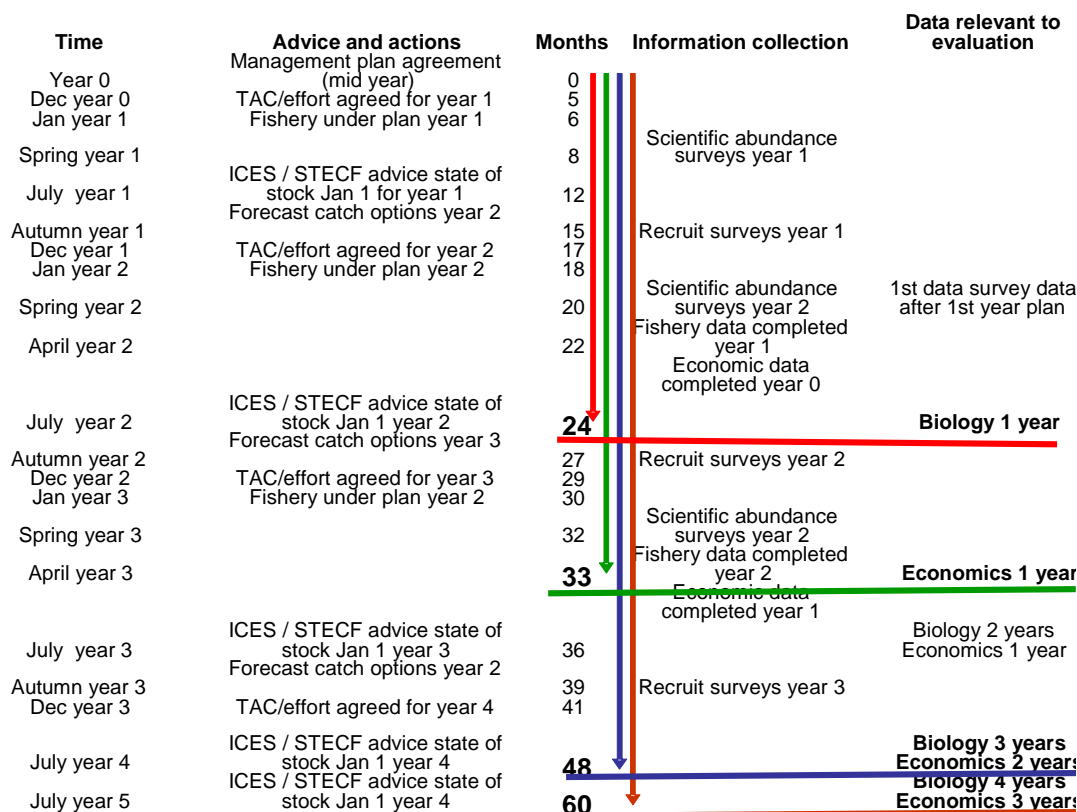
Time series should be long enough as to allow a proper evaluation. In that sense a three years evaluation period does not allow a consistent analysis. It is the fact that economic data are made available only 2 years after the year they refer too. Consequently evaluating the plan every three years means using data from the year the plan entered into force.

Availability of data and identification of indicators are closely linked. Profitability as indicator for multiannual plans has been discussed lengthy. The problem is that fishermen usually make profit based on several fisheries. Therefore measuring the profitability based on a stock by stock basis or on a plan by plan basis does hardly make sense.

Finally, RACs and national authorities are also called for providing “qualitative data”, i.e. information and observations made on the operation of the scheme or operation of the market.

## 2.5. Timing of the evaluation

The timing is essential. In the first generation of plans, the first deadline for evaluation is fixed at 3 years. STECF has made an analysis of the data availability, shown below.



As a conclusion it appears that multiannual plans need to be considered over a number of years. If the minimum period for routine evaluation is 3 years after implementation, then the timing of evaluations of plans needs to be linked to the availability of data :

- 3 years of biological data become available at month 48
- 3 years of economic data at approximately month 60.

Thus a full 3 years evaluation takes 5 years from the commencement.

Should the evaluation be made too early, i.e. less than 3 years after the entry into force, no clear economic impact could be identified. This has serious consequences on the opinion and commitment of stakeholders to the plan, in particular on fishermen who on their side will live in year Y.

### **3. METHODOLOGY FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

STECF representatives presented the conclusions of the STECF-SGMOS meeting held in February 2010 in Hamburg.

Participants quite quickly endorsed the methodology proposed and welcomed the involvement of RACs and of the national authorities into the process.

The discussion focused mainly on how to structure the scoping meeting, on the objectives of the scoping meeting and on the schedule to be developed.

#### **3.1. Objectives of the scoping meeting**

The objective of this meeting is to determine the workload required and to reconcile this with available resources, to arrive at an effective detailed plan of what is needed to carry out the technical work that will underpin the required Impact Assessment.

The scoping meeting will then:

- Clarify the objectives of the management plan
- Define a baseline for the assessment of options and scenarios:
  - the baseline is the social and economic situation observed at the end of the evaluation period (for plans subject to revision), or at the day it is decided to set up a management plan (for new plans)
  - baselines take into account the fishing fleets, onshore industries and communities that depend on the fishery concerned and of associated fisheries (e.g. size, turnover, costs, profits, employment for last three years) for each Member State and fishery affected.
  - Stock baseline is the state of the stock(s) at the beginning of the period.
- Define the ‘no change’ management regime that would be followed such that biological, economic and social consequences can be compared for the impact assessment period.
- Select a number of tactical options to be assessed and compared: select a number of plausible biological and economic scenarios against which the tactical options are tested in order to characterise the robustness of the different tactical options to external factors.
- Identify basic methodology to be used:
  - decide on the models to be used and define how they are to be parameterized, with stock dynamics, estimation and implementation components. Simulation methodology and criteria for stock modelling should follow ICES – SGMAS 2008 section 5
  - define the criteria (indicators and performance measures) to be retained and presented for all scenarios and options to allow comparison of scenarios and options.

- check that biological reference points are compatible with Stock/Recruit dynamics and reconcile if necessary.
  - define how the simulation work will be checked/verified.
- 
- Identify specific data that required and timescale for acquisition including any data call required. Data shall primarily be sourced from the Data Collection Framework from databases in JRC, although additional information should be sourced where necessary.
  - Identify who will do what on what timescale and under what conditions and define how the chair will monitor progress between the meetings
  - Agree work timetable and dates for meetings.
  - Prepare a Scoping meeting report detailing the agreed data requirement, modelling approach and parameterisation and made available no later than 15 days after the scoping meeting. The report should be prepared to document the calculation procedures that will be employed to give the parameters in the modelling and the range of conditions under which the plan has been evaluated. See standards in SGMAS 2008

### 3.2. Schedule for 2010 and 2011

The following schedule has been agreed.

1-5 Feb 2010	Apr (Plenary)	May	7-11 Jun 2010	Jul (Plenary)	Aug/Sept	Oct	Nov (Plenary)
Methodology for IA	Report on Evaluation sole & plaice NS	Consultation RACs	Scoping sole & plaice NS			IA sole & plaice NS	Report STECF
	Report on Evaluation Sole BoB	Consultation RACs	Scoping sole BoB			IA sole BoB	Report STECF
	Report on Evaluation Sole WC	Consultation RACs	Scoping sole WC			IA sole WC	Report STECF
			Scoping Hake-Nephrops-Anglerfish - Data			Evaluation Hake-Nephrops-Anglerfish (HNA)	Report STECF
			Scoping Cod Baltic - data				

Feb 2011	Apr (Plenary)	May	Jun	Jul (Plenary)	Aug/ Sept	Oct	Nov (Plenary)
Evaluation Cod Baltic	Report STECF		Scoping Cod Baltic – options IA			IA cod Baltic	Report STECF
Scoping IA HNA			IA Hake- Nephrops- Anglerfish	Report STECF			
Scoping Cod NS			Evaluation Cod NS				

### 3.3. Schedule for the next years

July-August Y-1	CLWP preparation Identification of needs for advice/plans
Sept-Nov Y-1	STECF bureau +RACs + Com Identify priorities
December Y-1	STECF Working programme agreed
February - March	STECF Working Group on  Scoping meeting Data calls
April	STECF Plenary
May - June	STECF Working Group on  Evaluation /IA 2 <sup>nd</sup> round scoping meetings Data calls
July	STECF Plenary
September – October	STECF Working Group on  Evaluation /IA
November	STECF Plenary

#### 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The methodology for evaluation and for impact assessment work has been endorsed. The logical steps of the process are as follows:

- (1) Commission requests STECF for evaluating a multiannual plan
- (2) STECF evaluation process :
  - (a) scoping meeting  
(STECF + RAC + national authorities + DG MARE)
  - (b) data recompilation (through data call managed by the DG Mare in accordance to the DCF and/or through specific procedures to be discussed in the scoping meeting)
  - (c) evaluation meeting
  - (d) evaluation report endorsed by plenary
- (3) Commission conclude the process:
  - (a) consolidation of the evaluation report,
  - (b) decision on the need to revised the plan
- (3bis) Commission decides to prepare a new plan
- (4) Commission requests STECF to assess the impact of different options for a multiannual plan;  
Commission proposes a first list of option
- (5) STECF impact assessment process
  - (a) Scoping meeting (STECF can add some options proposed by the scoping meeting)
  - (b) Data recompilation (through data call managed by the DG Mare in accordance to the DCF and/or through specific procedures to be discussed in the scoping meeting)
  - (c) "Impact assessment" meeting
  - (d) Assessment report endorsed by plenary
- (6) Commission concludes the process
  - (a) Decision on the option to be retained
  - (b) Preparation of the Impact assessment report
  - (c) Submission of the IA report to the board
  - (d) Preparation of the legislative proposal

Both evaluation and impact assessment will be preceded by a scoping meeting. The work will be done by the STECF under the supervision of DG MARE (operational units) and with involvement of RACs and, to a lesser extent, national authorities.

The scoping meeting aims at clarifying objective, focussing the work done, and identifying the data necessary and where they could be sourced from.

Should the need for additional data (= data out of the DCF scope) be confirmed during the impact assessment meeting, then it could be necessary to open a brainstorming process on data collection? Two paths for reflexion appeared: either opening a further mechanism for data collection, or reflecting on a larger involvement of the RAC in the data sharing process.

A schedule has been proposed and agreed with by participants. Nevertheless, a more complete time schedule, detailing all steps to be taken into account over the all IA process, including the formal consultation of RACs – and not only those strictly related to tasks STECF will have to deal with – has been requested by participants and will be consequently drafted and circulated by DG Mare.

Considering the workload linked to this activity, RAC could need to set up specific correspondent, or group of experts. They are invited to inform the Commission know on their experience.

The conclusions of the meeting will have to be presented to other RACs, and as far as possible to the member states (Management Committee).

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