

STATE MANAGED SPECIES – FALSE ALBACORE

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE FALSE ALBACORE AUGUST 2024

STATUS OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fishery Management Plan History

Original FMP Adoption:	None
Amendments:	None
Revisions:	None
Supplements:	None
Information Updates:	None
Schedule Changes:	None
Comprehensive Review:	None

Until 2011, false albacore (*Euthynnus alletteratus*), also known as “little tunny”, was part of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Although there were no management measures under the plan, data collection was an important component. Amendment 18 to the plan removed false albacore from the management unit since data would still be collected through current sampling regimes (SAFMC 2011). Based on data available at the time, false albacore did not appear to meet the federal national standard guidance for stocks in need of conservation and management. In North Carolina, false albacore was managed through N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule (MFC) Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0512; however, no limits were put in place. Authority to manage under this rule ended when the species was removed from SAFMC's Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP and subsequently the N.C. FMP for Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJ FMP), which adopts management measures within approved SAFMC, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) FMPs by reference as the minimum standard. In February 2023, the MFC requested a rule be developed for precautionary management of false albacore to limit the expansion of new and existing false albacore fisheries within North Carolina. The MFC approved the rule in February 2024, giving the Director proclamation authority to implement bag, vessel, and trip limits, if landings of false albacore in a calendar year exceed 200 percent of the five-year average of combined commercial and recreational landings from 2018-2022. This rule is undergoing review and is scheduled for adoption in 2025. There currently is no state or federal FMP for false albacore.

Management Unit

None

Goal and Objectives

None

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOCK

Biological Profile

False albacore (*Euthynnus alletteratus*), also known as “little tunny”, is one of the most common members of the mackerel/tuna family Scombridae. It is a tuna-shaped fish that is steel blue on top and silver below with wavy stripes along the posterior portion of the dorsal side of the body and scattered dark spots below the pectoral fin. Anglers often confuse false albacore with Atlantic bonito (*Sarda sarda*) due to similarity in size and coloration. False albacore is typically found in tropical to temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea; it is also found in the Mediterranean and Black seas. False albacore is a schooling species that migrates north in the spring and south in the fall and winter (Collette and Nuan 1983). Both sexes are fast-growing, with males attaining larger sizes than females (Kerstetter and Adams 2014). There is variability in the life history of false albacore throughout their range and little work has been done in the western Atlantic. In the Gulf of Mexico, the length at 50 percent maturity (L50) for females and males is 13.6 inches fork length (FL) (Cruz-Castan et al. 2019) and off the Brazilian coast, fish as young as one year old are capable of spawning (Vieira et al. 2021). False albacore spawn April through November in the Atlantic Ocean (Collette and Nuan 1983). Most studies estimate the maximum age of false albacore at five years (Adams and Kerstetter 2014; Vieira et al. 2021); however, Kahraman and Oray (2001) estimate maximum age up to nine years in Turkish waters.

Stock Status

The stock status of false albacore is unknown; however, there appears to be no biological concern for the stock since there is no evidence of size truncation in the commercial and recreational fisheries and the majority are well above L50. The division is continuing to collect data from recreational and commercial sampling efforts to monitor trends in landings.

Stock Assessment

There is not an approved stock assessment for false albacore in North Carolina or the western Atlantic coast.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERY

Current Regulations

Currently, there are no rules in place for false albacore management in North Carolina.

Commercial Fishery

False albacore tend to have low commercial value in the United States; however, it is a commercially important species in many other countries and is sold fresh, dried, canned, smoked, and frozen. Along the Atlantic coast, false albacore is commercially landed with multiple gears, including longlines, gill nets, hook and line, and trolling. In North Carolina, false albacore is incidentally caught by commercial fishers pursuing other species and is mainly harvested by gill net and hook and line gear. Other gears including pound nets, longlines, seines, and trawls make up a small percentage of the total commercial landings. Much of the commercially caught fish in North Carolina are shipped out of state.

In 2023, commercial landings were 121,842 pounds. Landings of false albacore averaged 156,256 pounds during 1997–2023, ranging from 77,798 in 2002 to 370,814 pounds in 1997 (Table 1; Figure 1). During 2014–2023, the average landings equaled 188,297 pounds. Statewide, landings

by gear have varied annually over the last 25 years (Table 2). In 2023, 60% of the false albacore harvest was taken by hook and line while the remaining 40% was harvested in gill nets (Table 2; Figure 2). Less than 1% of false albacore were landed with gears other than hook and line and gill net.

Table 1. Recreational harvest (number of fish released and weight) and releases (number of fish; MRIP) and commercial harvest (weight in pounds; Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and N.C. Trip Ticket Program) of false albacore from North Carolina, 1997 – 2023. All weights are in pounds.

Year	Recreational			Commercial	Total Weight Landed (lb)
	Number Landed	Number Released	Weight Landed (lb)	Weight Landed (lb)	
1997	31,786	48,107	222,310	370,814	593,124
1998	25,206	75,618	200,844	153,797	354,641
1999	15,895	77,884	90,008	143,359	233,367
2000	13,931	41,590	85,778	106,777	192,555
2001	8,702	78,517	53,955	98,352	152,307
2002	13,717	89,706	61,385	77,798	139,183
2003	12,294	24,662	79,071	86,568	165,639
2004	7,955	62,965	95,088	92,319	187,407
2005	6,938	68,636	69,868	88,741	158,609
2006	3,319	39,901	29,943	106,617	136,560
2007	3,098	115,324	29,494	134,666	164,160
2008	12,376	33,205	76,228	103,743	179,971
2009	17,018	83,453	139,433	146,088	285,521
2010	7,373	66,459	49,290	147,337	196,627
2011	7,807	30,347	55,290	131,549	186,839
2012	18,393	59,160	140,026	157,849	297,875
2013	28,669	108,149	218,470	189,746	408,216
2014	27,469	273,165	189,270	225,797	415,067
2015	22,855	87,239	207,889	164,964	372,853
2016	41,076	145,700	337,842	233,501	571,343
2017	39,213	119,648	334,363	216,557	550,920
2018	47,892	110,716	315,758	204,177	519,935
2019	27,360	80,205	185,094	232,879	417,973
2020	92,899	171,564	594,794	230,685	825,479
2021	17,096	52,788	118,784	105,306	224,090
2022	38,772	127,255	234,922	147,079	382,001
2023	31,443	25,405	168,654	121,842	290,496
Mean	22,983	85,088	162,365	156,256	318,621

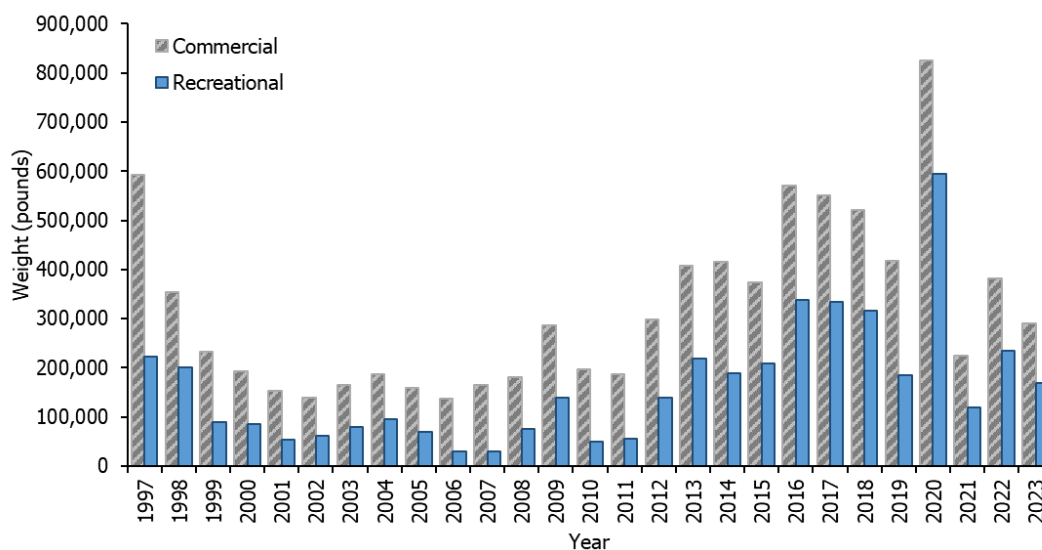


Figure 1. Annual commercial (Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and N.C. Trip Ticket Program) and recreational (MRIP) landings in pounds for false albacore in North Carolina from 1981 – 2023.

Table 2. North Carolina commercial landings in pounds by gear and value, 1997-2023. (Source: North Carolina Trip Ticket Program)

Year	Gear			Total	Value	Price/Pound
	Gill Nets	Hook & Line	Other			
1997	338,260	23,981	8,574	370,814	\$80,901	\$0.22
1998	122,849	26,273	4,676	153,797	\$42,981	\$0.28
1999	111,193	30,973	1,193	143,359	\$23,318	\$0.16
2000	81,908	20,415	4,455	106,777	\$18,590	\$0.17
2001	65,787	26,422	6,144	98,352	\$18,154	\$0.18
2002	54,457	18,709	4,632	77,798	\$15,685	\$0.20
2003	50,419	22,372	13,777	86,568	\$16,172	\$0.19
2004	58,294	27,580	6,444	92,319	\$15,496	\$0.17
2005	55,284	29,682	3,775	88,741	\$24,183	\$0.27
2006	60,062	44,887	1,668	106,617	\$35,703	\$0.33
2007	63,996	69,110	1,560	134,666	\$48,745	\$0.36
2008	35,346	66,794	1,603	103,743	\$40,280	\$0.39
2009	56,584	84,496	5,008	146,088	\$61,559	\$0.42
2010	54,129	88,131	5,077	147,337	\$76,491	\$0.52
2011	41,755	77,602	12,193	131,549	\$66,986	\$0.51
2012	85,009	71,003	1,837	157,849	\$89,798	\$0.57
2013	81,426	100,885	7,435	189,746	\$114,416	\$0.60
2014	101,489	123,707	601	225,797	\$107,605	\$0.48
2015	91,795	71,473	1,696	164,964	\$85,493	\$0.52
2016	130,824	76,301	26,376	233,501	\$110,271	\$0.47
2017	124,697	89,529	2,331	216,557	\$112,474	\$0.52
2018	97,303	106,212	662	204,177	\$127,204	\$0.62
2019	153,176	78,848	854	232,879	\$132,982	\$0.57
2020	171,089	58,691	905	230,685	\$193,782	\$0.84
2021	66,075	38,919	312	105,306	\$106,813	\$1.01
2022	86,668	60,182	227	147,079	\$165,188	\$1.12
2023	48,273	72,942	627	121,842	\$141,668	\$1.16

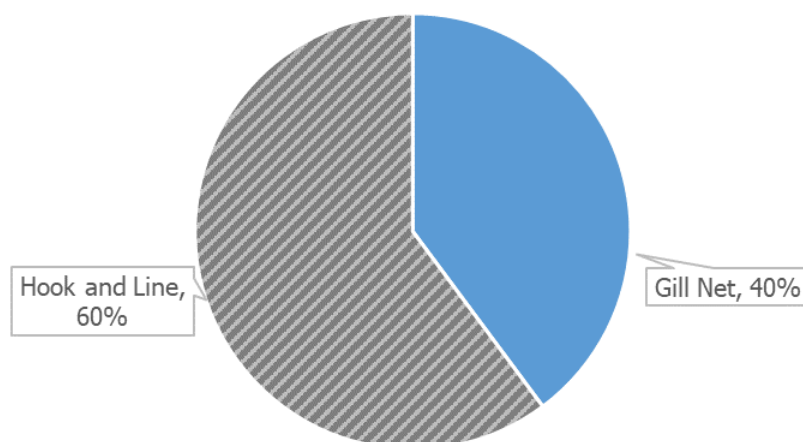


Figure 2. Commercial harvest in 2023 by gear type.

Recreational Fishery

Recreational landings of false albacore are estimated from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Recreational estimates across all years have been updated and are now based on the MRIP new Fishing Effort Survey-based calibrated estimates. For more information on MRIP see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data>. Recreational catch of false albacore has been trending upward over the last decade (Table 1; Figure 1), as false albacore is a popular targeted species because of its strength and speed. The predominant gear for the recreational fishery is hook-and-line, and the most popular methods are either sight casting or trolling. While most fish are released alive, some recreational anglers use false albacore as bait (strip or live) for other fisheries such as shark, billfish, and wahoo; it is unknown how prevalent this practice is.

Anglers harvested 31,443 fish (168,654) pounds of false albacore in 2023. Recreational landings in North Carolina have been low but variable since 1997, though they have started to trend upwards since 2012 (Table 1; Figure 1). Landings have ranged from 3,098 fish (29,494 pounds) in 2007 to 92,899 fish (594,794 pounds) in 2020. In the last ten years, an average of 38,608 fish (268,737 pounds) have been landed in North Carolina. Since 2014, recreational releases have accounted for approximately 68% of the catch in North Carolina. The number of fish released has ranged from 24,662 fish in 2003 to 273,165 fish in 2014.

The DMF offers award citations for exceptional catches of false albacore. False albacore greater than 20 pounds or 34 inches FL are eligible for an award citation. In 2023, 18 citations were awarded (Figure 3).

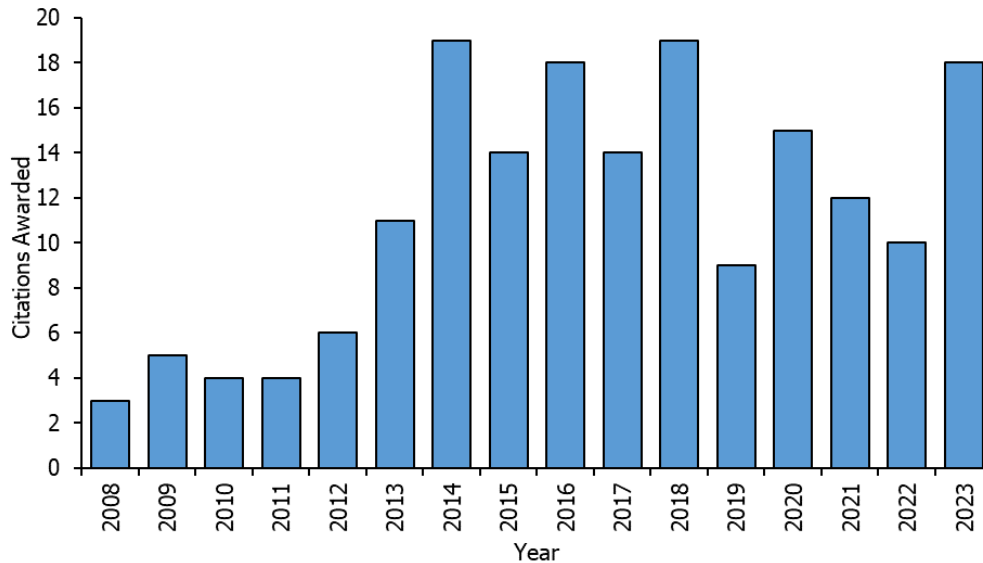


Figure 3. North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament citations awarded for false albacore, 2008–2023. Citations are awarded for false albacore greater than 20 pounds or 34 inches fork length.

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA

Fishery-Dependent Monitoring

Length-frequency information for the commercial false albacore fishery in North Carolina is collected through the division’s Program 434 (Ocean Gill Net Fishery), Program 438 (Offshore Live Bottom Fishery) and Program 439 (Coastal Pelagic). Through these programs, 142 false albacore were measured with a mean length of 30.6 inches FL (Table 3; Figure 4). Length and weight information for the recreational fishery are collected through the MRIP dockside sampling (Table 4; Figure 5).

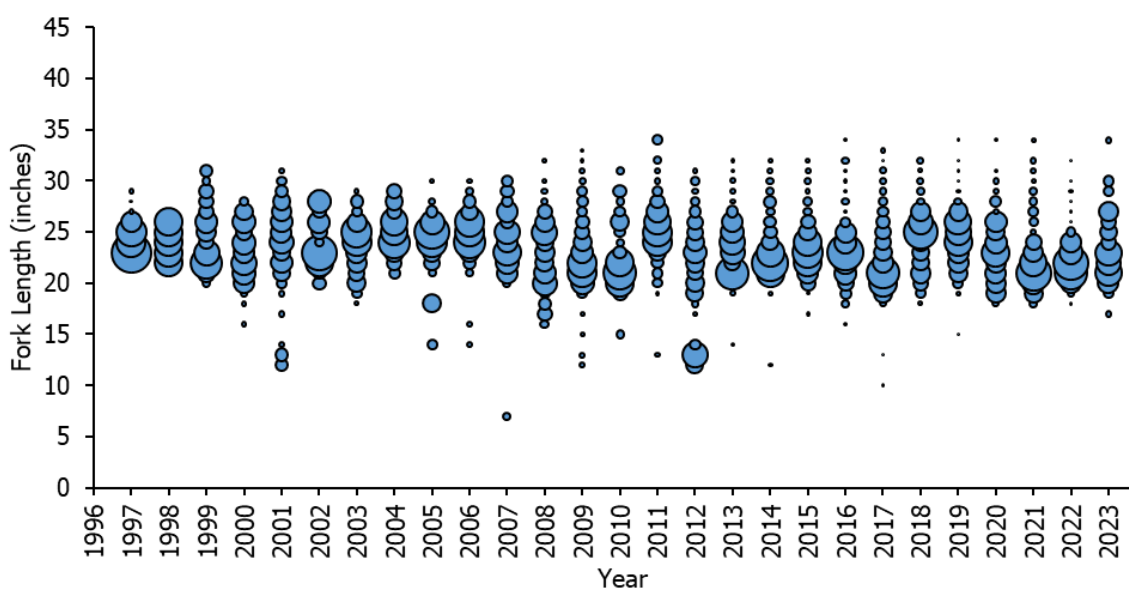


Figure 4. Commercial length frequency (fork length, inches) of harvested false albacore harvested, 1997–2023. Bubbles represent fish harvested at length and the size of the bubble is equal to the proportion of fish at that length.

Table 3. False albacore length (fork length, inches) data from commercial fish house samples, 1997–2023.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1997	25.1	22.4	29.8	41
1998	24.5	22.4	26.5	5
1999	24.7	20.5	31.2	59
2000	23.8	16.5	28.7	73
2001	24.2	12.2	31.2	200
2002	25.0	20.8	28.9	37
2003	24.0	18.9	29.4	94
2004	25.3	21.4	29.9	147
2005	24.3	14.1	30.1	95
2006	25.2	14.7	30.3	92
2007	24.5	7.8	30.7	59
2008	23.4	16.5	32.2	180
2009	23.6	13.0	33.3	409
2010	22.7	15.4	31.7	72
2011	25.3	19.6	34.1	133
2012	22.4	12.6	30.9	196
2013	24.2	14.2	32.3	230
2014	23.9	12.0	32.5	417
2015	24.1	17.2	32.8	281
2016	23.2	16.2	34.6	228
2017	22.8	10.6	33.7	393
2018	24.2	19.0	32.6	159
2019	23.8	16.0	34.1	417
2020	22.8	18.8	34.3	236
2021	22.5	18.3	34.2	222
2022	22.8	18.9	32.4	242
2023	30.6	17.8	46.5	142

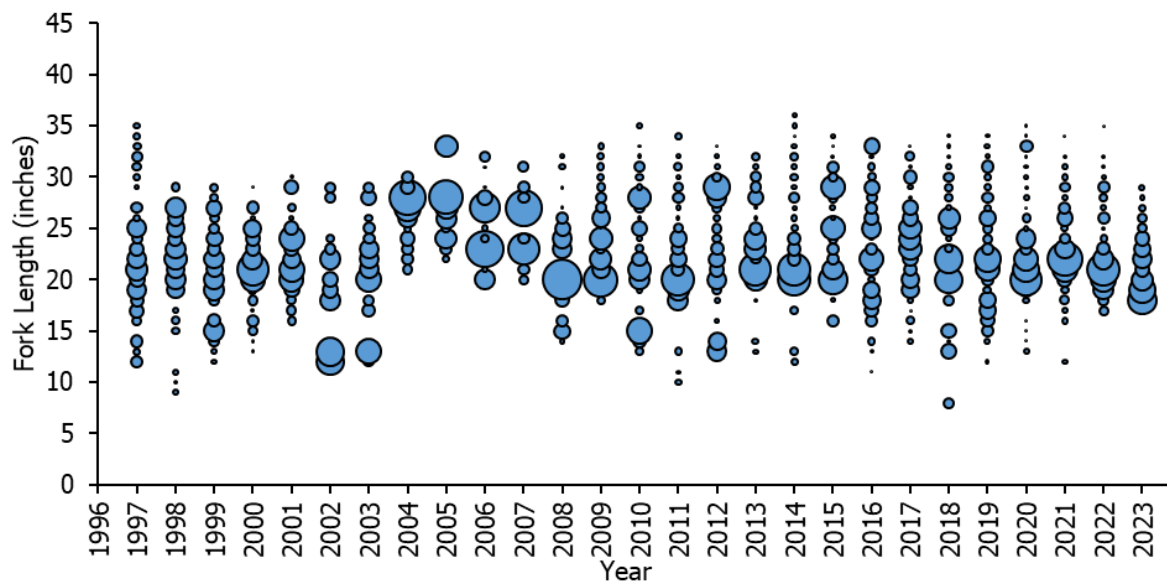


Figure 5. Recreational length frequency (fork length, inches) of harvested false albacore harvested, 1997–2023. Bubbles represent fish harvested at length and the size of the bubble is equal to the proportion of fish at that length.

Table 4. Total number measured, mean, minimum, and maximum length (inches) of false albacore measured by MRIP sampling in North Carolina, 1981–2023.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1997	22.1	12.1	35.7	125
1998	23.1	9.4	29.5	164
1999	21.2	12.6	29.4	74
2000	22.0	13.4	29.1	35
2001	22.5	16.9	30.6	67
2002	17.5	12.0	29.4	28
2003	20.7	12.9	29.4	34
2004	27.3	21.3	30.4	28
2005	28.0	22.8	33.5	24
2006	25.0	20.1	32.1	4
2007	25.7	20.2	31.6	19
2008	21.3	14.9	32.8	28
2009	23.3	18.3	33.9	81
2010	21.8	13.9	35.4	72
2011	21.8	10.9	34.3	49
2012	23.1	13.4	33.5	85
2013	23.4	14.0	33.0	34
2014	22.2	12.4	36.1	93
2015	24.3	16.9	34.4	63
2016	23.7	12.0	33.3	136
2017	24.0	14.8	33.3	81
2018	21.8	8.5	34.3	102
2019	22.3	12.4	35.0	149
2020	22.4	12.4	35.7	261
2021	22.9	12.6	34.4	147
2022	22.0	17.2	35.6	146
2023	21.1	18.3	29.8	66

Fishery-Independent Monitoring

Currently, the division does not have any fishery-independent sampling programs that target or catch false albacore in great numbers.

RESEARCH NEEDS

The following have been identified as research needs for false albacore in North Carolina.

- Support tagging programs to develop estimates of growth, natural mortality, fishing mortality, and track the movement of adults throughout the stock's range; include methods to estimate tag retention, reporting rate, and tagging-induced mortality.
- Conduct reproductive studies including spawning periodicity, age- and size-specific fecundity, maturity schedule, and conduct spawning area surveys throughout the stock's range.
- Expand discard sampling to collect information on gear, depth, location, and age and size distribution of discarded fish for the recreational and commercial sectors.

MANAGEMENT

In North Carolina, false albacore was managed through MFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0512; however, no limits were put in place. Authority to manage under this rule ended when the species was removed from the SAFMC's Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP and subsequently the N.C. IJ FMP, which adopts management measures within approved SAFMC, MAFMC, and ASMFC FMPs by reference as the minimum standard.

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