



# Submission from the Australian Library and Information Association to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-safety

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## Supporting organisations

The following organisations support the submission from the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA):

- National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)
- Australian School Library Association (ASLA)
- Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA)
- Australian Government Libraries Information Network (AGLIN)
- ACT Library and Information Service (ACTLIS)

Public Libraries Australia (PLA)  
Public Libraries NSW Country (PLC)  
Public Libraries NSW Metropolitan Association (PLM)  
Public Libraries of South Australia (PLSA)  
Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN)  
Public Libraries Western Australia (PLWA)  
Queensland Public Library Association (QPLA)  
Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA)

## **Introduction**

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the supporting organisations welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety.

ALIA is the peak body representing the library and information services sector. It represents 6,000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users.

We are committed to promoting the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.

Library and information services professionals are committed to the following core values:

- Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works.
- Connection of people to ideas.
- Commitment to literacy, information literacy and learning.
- Respect for the diversity and individuality of all people.
- Preservation of the human record.

Australians are supported in the development of literacy and reading, access to the internet, and resources for education, business, health and community through a network of over 1,500 national, state and public library service points. In addition Australians benefit by services provided by approximately 9,000 school libraries, 42 university libraries, technical and further education libraries, and hundreds of special libraries such as health libraries, law libraries, and corporate libraries.

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)  
<http://www.alia.org.au>

## **ALIA and internet use**

ALIA's policy on online content regulation is based on the right of library users to unhindered access to online information.

Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas.

Libraries and information services facilitate and promote public access to the widest variety of information, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society. The selection and availability

of library materials and services, including online content and services, is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views.

Libraries and information services support the right of all users to unhindered access to information of their choice regardless of format. Access to electronic information resources should not be restricted except as required by law and this basic right should not be eroded in the development of regulatory measures for online information.

Users are assisted with the necessary skills and a suitable environment in which to use their chosen information sources and services freely and confidently. Each user's right to privacy and confidentiality is protected with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted.

In addition to the many valuable resources available on the internet, some are incorrect, misleading and may be offensive. Libraries and information services proactively promote and facilitate responsible access to quality networked information for all their users, including children and young people. They enable library users to learn to use the internet and electronic information efficiently and effectively.

*ALIA statement on online content regulation*

<http://www.alia.org.au/policies/content.regulation.html>

ALIA endorses and supports effective, practical and appropriate measures that assist Australians to manage their use of the internet. We believe that cybersafety education is one of the most effective strategies to manage content issues.

ALIA has been active in the public debate on online content regulation since 1996, and has consistently raised the awareness of cybersafety issues in the library community. ALIA has an expert advisory group, the ALIA Online Content and Regulation Advisory Committee, that advises the Association and its Board of Directors. The Association has a dedicated webpage for advocacy and policy concerning online content:

<http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>

The Association has worked proactively with libraries and the Australian Media and Communications Authority (ACMA) to promote and facilitate responsible access to online information for all their users, including children and young people. Together with ACMA, ALIA has developed practical guides in print and multimedia formats for library staff and families that “aim to complement existing policies in libraries and provide additional resources and support to library staff”.

*ACMA Cybersmart website* <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Libraries.aspx>

ALIA has supported and promoted Federal Government programs including Cyber Security Awareness Week, Safer Internet Day and Stay Smart Online, and is currently represented on the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Consultative Working Group on Cybersafety. ALIA is a founding member of the Safer Internet Group which brings together organisations which are committed to promoting a safer online experience for Australian families.

### **Libraries and the National Broadband Network**

To ensure greater coordination and collaboration in addressing issues concerning the online environment including cybersafety, ALIA urges the federal government to recognise the

importance of a national framework for funding for Australian public libraries to enable Australia's digital future.

ALIA believes that public libraries are a major stakeholder in the national broadband strategy and enable internet access for the delivery of better health, education, business, community, and government services.

The role of public libraries in the national broadband strategy has been recognised for many years. The Libraries Working Group of the Cultural Ministers Council 1996 report *Vision 2020: towards libraries of the future* advanced the cause of libraries as central places of provision of public internet access. That report was quoted in the 2001 Senate report *Libraries in the online environment* which also made recommendations about public libraries.

*Libraries in the online environment*

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita\\_ctte/completed\\_inquiries/2002-04/online\\_libraries/report/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/online_libraries/report/index.htm)

Public libraries are a major stakeholder in the national broadband strategy for the following reasons:

- there is existing physical and technological infrastructure in public libraries (more than 1,500) in every local government area across the nation
- there is a huge and increasing usage of electronic information services in public libraries and a resulting increase in community expectations of internet assistance
- public libraries are the key provider of free internet access for many people who do not have access at home or through school and work
- public libraries have a crucial role in building strong and sustainable communities by providing equitable internet access in remote and rural communities, in Indigenous communities, to people at lower socioeconomic levels, to seniors, and to marginalised groups who are without internet skills or computers at home
- public libraries have a role in enabling internet access, assistance and technology for people with disabilities
- the provision of quality online information, through Electronic Resources Australia, is fundamental to a well-informed, educated, economically competitive and democratic society
- support for internet education and skills training for users is required and can be delivered to communities via public libraries
- public libraries provide access to e-government services and publications.

### **ALIA research on internet access in public libraries**

ALIA conducts regular national surveys about internet access in public libraries, with the next survey to be undertaken in late 2010.

<http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>

Our evidence base shows that complaints about internet content within public libraries are extremely rare, representing 0.2% of users. Of those complaints that are made, 64% are about adults' access and 36% concern children. Most complaints are about adults accessing legal sexually explicit material, not about children being exposed to such material.

In terms of internet content complaints, the percentage of libraries which have received complaints about internet content continues to fall - from 55% in 2002, 50% in 2005, and 43% in 2008.

The *ALIA Internet access in public libraries survey 2008* shows that since 2005 there has been a 41% increase in the number of public access internet terminals in public libraries. The increase since 2005 in the number of users each week is 91% – that means that an estimated 147,000 users access the internet via their local public library each week.

Public libraries are conscious of balancing free access to information and community concerns around inappropriate internet content and usage. The trend is towards an increase in the use of filtering software in public libraries: 36% of respondents in 2008 compared with 30% in 2005. However, our research provides evidence that using internet filtering does not stop complaints.

## **Topic #1: Online environment in which Australian children currently engage**

Libraries, especially school and public libraries, are key physical points of internet access for Australian children and are therefore major stakeholders able to control or influence children's engagement in the online environment.

### ***Public libraries and internet access***

Public libraries are community hubs within rural, regional and metropolitan areas. Libraries are at the heart of local communities. The free public library network in Australia is the key provider of free access to information and services; public libraries are recognised as trusted, friendly, neutral and non-threatening spaces for individual or group social inclusion.

Public access to the internet and computers is transforming public libraries into de facto e-government access points. All levels of government agencies in Australia increasingly refer people to public libraries to receive both access to and assistance with online services.

Access to the internet, and particularly to broadband, is an extremely important enabler for the delivery of better health, education, community and emergency services in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Library Council of New South Wales Report *NSW Public Libraries and eGovernment 2006* identified the increasing use of libraries for this purpose, particularly regional libraries. <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pls/publications/pdf/egov.pdf>

### ***Public libraries and internet access for children***

The *ALIA Internet access in public libraries survey 2008* revealed the following features of the online environment in public libraries for children:

Since 2002, libraries have continued to develop and improve their internet services for children. There are separate internet terminals for use by children at 33% of responding libraries compared with 20% in 2005 and 16% in 2002. Websites for children and young adults that link to material especially recommended for them are available in 56% of responding libraries compared with 52% in 2005 and 47% in 2002.

Parental consent was required for children to use the internet by 77% of respondents – an increase of 6% since 2005. Of the 77%, 52% of library services required parental or guardian consent up to 18 years of age – 8% less than in 2005. Alternatively, the choice of up to 16 years increased from 21% to 24%. Children over 8 years was the youngest age not requiring parental consent in responding libraries.

Almost a third of responding library services required parents to be present with children using the internet, an increase of 8% from 2005. The age up to which a parent or carer is required to be present with a child using the internet varies widely, from 6 years of age in one case to 18 years of age in four cases. In 15 cases, the most common age limit is 12 years. In eight cases, it was ten years, and in eight cases, eight years. Access to the internet for children in responding libraries appears to be closely linked to individual community values. Parental consent requirements varied within states and territories and across rural and metropolitan libraries except for Tasmania where the one policy regulation covers the entire state.

Of the responding libraries who used filters in the 2008 survey:

- 92% filtered offensive content
- 36% filtered very large files
- 27% filtered file sharing
- 21% filtered social networking sites e.g. YouTube, MySpace, Facebook
- 20% filtered games.

<http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>

### ***School libraries and internet access for children***

It is important to note that in many schools, the main location for internet access outside of the classroom is in the library. School library staff are very familiar with internet-use policy and procedures as outlined in their schools, and with current information and research about safe online practices.

School libraries are extremely valuable and crucial partners in facilitating the delivery of the important messages about cybersecurity and cybersafety. Teacher librarians contribute significantly to the development of knowledge and understanding of cybersafety of young Australian students through the teaching and learning programs and digital access points delivered through the school library. These teaching and learning programs focus specifically on digital information literacy skill development which includes being literate across multiple media areas within the context of an ever-changing technological world.

ALIA's recent submission to the federal government's *Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools* highlighted the importance of having a teacher librarian in every Australian school to teach literacy skills, in particular digital literacy skills and safe online practices.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/subs.htm>

### ***Cybersafety measures already in place in Australian libraries***

Australia's libraries, including school, higher education and public libraries, take their responsibilities related to children and young adults very seriously and have developed user behaviour policies and specific measures to increase cybersafety.

ALIA encourages libraries to:

1. Offer internet access with the fewest possible restrictions
2. Incorporate internet-use principles into overall policies on access to library resources
3. Comply with organisational and library policies, and relevant legislation
4. Have user behaviour policies and to publicise these policies widely. Policies should state clearly that users are responsible for what they access online. Users should be reminded that:
  - o not all material on the internet is complete, accurate or up-to-date
  - o library workstations are not private or secure
  - o internet access should not be used for illegal activity, or to access illegal material
  - o complaint mechanisms exist for online material that is believed to be prohibited
5. Have user behaviour policies that specify the conditions of use for children
6. Locate internet computers within libraries to balance access and privacy
7. Create library web pages that point to appropriately reviewed sites for both general use and use by children
8. Take an active role in educating their communities about intellectual freedom principles and the shared responsibilities of libraries, information services and the community in facilitating responsible and rewarding use of information resources including the internet
9. Encourage parents and guardians to take responsibility for supervising their children's internet experience
10. Facilitate community education and training programs on accessing online information
11. Conduct regular policy reviews including consultation with their user communities
12. Ensure that all staff are familiar with library policies and the relevant legislation
13. Keep statistics on internet use.

### ***New technologies***

Wireless and mobile applications and devices are driving profound changes across all industries and sectors, providing increased flexibility, convenience and control for users.

At the same time, these new technologies illustrate that the challenges for cybersafety and cybersecurity solutions extend far beyond the website-based internet and home-based computers.

Portable, multifunction devices and increasingly available wireless access in public places presents additional challenges. Domestic wireless access that is unsecured has the potential of being used in harmful or unacceptable ways.

User behaviour in this changing online environment is driving and being driven in unpredictable directions by these new technologies and applications. One of the challenges is that children as young as nine or ten years of age with sophisticated technological abilities may not fully understand the risks or implications of certain behaviour.

Effective education programs informed by research and consultation and clear cybersafety policies in public areas are required.

## **Topics #2-5: Abuse of children online, particularly cyberbullying, inappropriate behaviours, identity theft, and breaches of privacy**

ALIA believes that additional funding is urgently required for research and consultation with parents, children and young adults on the complex issues of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and youth behaviour in order to develop and implement the most effective programs and practices that are informed by evidence and data.

A national coordinated approach is essential. There are many initiatives and sources of information available from a large variety of bodies including universities, all three levels of government – local, state and federal, schools and education departments, and not for profit associations. It is becoming overwhelming for parents, teachers, children and other users to navigate all the information and advice, and to find applicable and practical information quickly when necessary.

It is imperative that education and guidance on new technologies in social networking be provided to parents, teachers, community groups and library staff. New and changing technologies are being introduced at such a rate that expert and ongoing guidance is required.

ALIA and ASLA (Australian School Library Association) as the national peak bodies representing library and information workers in public and school libraries, look forward to collaborating with the federal government on educational and training initiatives, and to promoting those initiatives to the library community.

## **Topic #6: Australian and international responses to these cyber-safety threats**

ALIA believes that freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas. ALIA supports the basic right of library and information services users to unhindered access to information regardless of format.

ALIA is opposed to mandatory ISP filtering on the basis of freedom of access to information.

ALIA made a submission to the recent consultation paper from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy on *Measures to increase accountability and transparency for Refused Classification material*. In that submission, ALIA acknowledged that we need to do something effective to stop children seeing extreme pornography on the internet but a balance also needs to be found between protecting children and censoring adults.  
[http://www.dbcde.gov.au/funding\\_and\\_programs/cybersafety\\_plan/transparency\\_measures/submissions](http://www.dbcde.gov.au/funding_and_programs/cybersafety_plan/transparency_measures/submissions)

The government's recent proposal risks giving parents a false sense of security and will not block the vast majority of sites unsuitable for children, nor lessen other serious risks facing children online such as cyberbullying. Most undesirable content is transmitted via peer-to-peer networking, instant messaging, torrents, direct emails and chat rooms rather than from normal websites.

For ALIA and Australia's library and information services, together with the support for freedom of information, comes the need to exercise due care in the provision of information.

Australia's libraries, including school, higher education and public libraries, take their responsibilities related to internet access for children and young adults very seriously and have developed user behaviour policies and specific measures to increase cybersafety.

The key to protecting children online is education, empowerment, supervision, and voluntary filtering. Adequate funding of cybersafety education for children and parents should be a major component of the Government's policy on online safety.

## **Topic #7: Opportunities for cooperation**

There are many opportunities for cooperation with Australian stakeholders, and ALIA, as part of its advocacy over many years, has established relationships with several bodies and organisations who are already working in the area of cybersafety. The coordination of cybersafety research and education is essential in order to develop, provide and promote the most effective and practical measures that are informed by research evidence and data.

**Safer Internet Group** <http://www.saferinternetgroup.org/>

ALIA is a founding member of the Safer Internet Group which brings together Australia's leading sponsors of research, outreach and online safety campaigns.

The Safer Internet Group comprises the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Google, Inspire Foundation, Yahoo!, Internet Industry Association, Internet Society of Australia, System Administrators Guild of Australia and Australian Council of State School Organisations. These organisations agree that Australia needs to take effective action to ensure that internet users, and particularly children, have a safe experience online.

The core principles of the Safer Internet Group are:

1. More effective education  
Properly funding a national comprehensive cyber-safety education program for children and parents on how to avoid inappropriate material and stay safe online.
2. Comprehensive policing of illegal material on the internet  
Significantly increasing and funding the level of oversight by the police focused on the locations, such peer-to-peer, where child sexual abuse materials are disseminated.

3. Industry tools that work  
Appropriate technology solutions which give people choice. Computer and Internet users today have a wide variety of effective tools available to them to shape their online experience. These tools provide for a much greater level of control and crucially put the user (or parent) in control.
4. Promotion and support of broader participation in ongoing solutions
5. Targeted research of internet risks and opportunities for young people.

#### **Alannah and Madeline Foundation**

ALIA is working with the Foundation to extend their e-smart schools program to e-smart libraries.

#### **Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)**

ALIA has worked with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) over the past few years to develop resources and training programs designed to assist library staff in promoting safe internet use in public libraries, particularly for children. Two guides were developed in 2008, and subsequently revised with ALIA's collaboration in 2009: *Cybersmart guide for library staff*, and the *Cybersmart guide for families*. ALIA assisted ACMA in delivering an information pack to every Australian public library in 2008.

<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Libraries.aspx>

#### **Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**

ALIA is represented on the Department's Consultative Working Group on Cybersafety.

#### **Federal campaigns**

ALIA has been active in supporting and promoting the government's campaigns to the library and information community through its electronic communication channels and print publications.

The campaigns that ALIA has actively supported and promoted include:

- Safer Internet Day
- National Cyber Security Awareness Week  
In 2010, ALIA met with the marketing company to provide advice about the most suitable resources for libraries and how to reach the library community. ALIA promoted print resources to libraries eg flyers, posters, bookmarks.
- Stay Smart Online.

## **Topic #8: Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying**

### ***Role of the school library and teacher librarian***

School libraries are extremely valuable and crucial partners in facilitating their school's delivery of the important messages about cybersecurity and cybersafety. In many schools, it is the teacher librarian who provides resources about the appropriate use of a wide range of digital resources and technologies, including cybersafety, cyberbullying, privacy, and identity theft.

Teacher librarians have an important role in teaching information and digital literacy skills and can reinforce the cybersafety messages as part of this teaching.

It is important to note that in many schools, the main location for internet access outside of the classroom is in the library. School library staff are very familiar with internet-use policy and procedures as outlined in their schools, and with current information and research about safe online practices.

As is done in other types of libraries which offer internet access, school libraries develop and publicise internet-use policies, develop procedures such as placing computers in visible areas, create web pages that point to appropriate sites, facilitate training for users, and take an active role in educating their communities.

At the school level each person's digital footprint is important and should be protected. Students are encouraged to check their digital footprint regularly to make sure that false information about them is not placed online.

The school library also acts as a communications hub; in many schools, teachers, parents, students and members of the wider community gather in the library to work together on issues or projects. The school library has a role in facilitating the collaboration between schools and parents on the issue of cybersafety awareness.

However, many schools do not have a qualified teacher librarian and some do not have a school library. They are therefore disadvantaged in being able to teach information and digital literacy skills. Facilitating the effective participation of students in the area of cybersafety would also be negatively affected.

ALIA and ASLA recently made submissions to the federal government's *Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools*. A key principle is that there should be a teacher librarian in every Australian school in order to achieve the best educational and social outcomes for all young Australians, and to ensure their lifelong participation in the Australian economy, culture and society.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/subs.htm>

### ***Communication and collaboration through social media***

Using social media platforms to more effectively communicate cybersafety messages to children and young adults is crucial. Social media could also be used to bring together groups of parents

and teachers, and help them develop skills to support and communicate the correct information. This would allow for upskilling through sharing experiences and could be facilitated by an online trainer or facilitator. Promoting a fast paced learning environment that could be shared with children would help to ensure open communication channels.

## **Topic #9: The role of parents, families, carers and the community**

ALIA believes strongly that parents, families, carers and the community all have a role in developing and promoting effective cybersafety measures. As community and social hubs, libraries – particularly school, public and higher education libraries – are major stakeholders in the development and promotion of cybersafety messages.

Parents need to educate themselves on how to protect their children, and to have greater access to resources and experts to assist with this education. Many school libraries are already working within their schools to offer sessions to parents, and public libraries are reaching out not only to parents but also to the whole community.

### ***Public libraries reaching out to the community***

Public libraries could play a much stronger role in reaching out to the community and delivering cybersafety messages. There is a network of over 1,500 public libraries in all local government areas across Australia and this network could be effectively used to deliver ongoing cybersafety programs. There is a huge and increasing usage of electronic information services in public libraries and they are the key provider of free internet access for many people who do not have access at home or through school and work. They are also meeting a growing demand to provide access and assistance to e-government services and publications. Internet skills training is already offered in many public libraries.

A program delivered through Australia's 1,500 public libraries should be funded as an important mechanism for promoting cybersafety messages to the general community. This would include the development of resources, a series of workshops across the country, and a model for ongoing support.

ALIA has worked with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) over the past few years to develop resources and training programs for public library staff to promote safe internet use for children. An information pack which included two guides, the *Cybersmart guide for library staff*, and the *Cybersmart guide for families*, was sent to every Australian public library in 2008.

### ***Cybersafety for the ageing population***

ALIA believes that it is important to also recognise the need for cybersafety and cybersecurity resources and training for senior Australians. The number of citizens aged over 65 is growing rapidly and this section of the population is not as knowledgeable or as skilled with new technology as younger generations. Public libraries are already providing internet assistance and training for seniors – assistance that is not available through any other public service. This ever-increasing demand includes help with everyday needs such as setting up email accounts, online

banking, setting up mobile phones, completing government forms, accessing e-government information, applying for Centrelink benefits, etc. Funding needs to be provided through public libraries for workshops and appropriate resources for the ageing population to ensure a safe online experience.

## **Term of Reference: Online Ombudsman**

ALIA believes that the Australian Media and Communications Authority is already fulfilling the functions of an ombudsman such as investigating, advocating and acting on cybersafety issues. Therefore, we do not support the establishment of an Online Ombudsman which may cause confusion for concerned parents and users in the community.

## **Recommendations**

ALIA makes the following six recommendations for an effective approach to cybersafety:

### **1. Recognition of the role of libraries**

- a. Recognising the role of public libraries in providing vital infrastructure for Australia's digital future and using the Australia-wide network as the mechanism for promoting cybersafety messages to the general community
- b. Recognising the role of teacher librarians and school libraries in promoting cybersafety messages and teaching digital information literacy skills

### **2. National comprehensive education program**

Properly funding an effective national comprehensive cybersafety education program for children, parents and the community with public libraries and school libraries as the mechanism for reaching these communities

### **3. Targeted research of internet risks and opportunities for young people**

Funding a coordinated research program to look into the world's best practice safeguards, user behaviour, new technologies and how technology can be part of the solution, and evidence based practices

### **4. Promotion and support of broader participation in ongoing solutions**

Facilitating collaboration among bodies working in cybersafety solutions and research to ensure a coordinated and inclusive approach

### **5. More funding to increase effective policing of illegal material on the internet**

Significantly increasing and funding the level of oversight by the police focused on the locations, such peer-to-peer, where child sexual abuse materials are disseminated

### **6. Appropriate technology solutions which give people choice**

Computer and internet users today have a wide variety of effective tools available to them to shape their online experience. These tools provide for a much greater level of control and crucially put the user (or parent) in control.

## **Conclusion**

For ALIA and Australia's library and information services, together with the support for freedom of information and unhindered access to electronic information resources, comes the need to exercise due care in the provision of information.

The role of Australia's libraries, in particular school and public libraries, should be recognised as important stakeholders in the promotion of a safer experience online for all Australians.

Libraries and information services proactively promote and facilitate responsible access to quality networked information for all their users, including children and young people.

ALIA endorses and supports effective, practical and appropriate measures that assist Australians to manage their use of the internet. We believe that cybersafety education is one of the most effective strategies to manage content issues. Adequate funding of cybersafety education for children and parents should be a major component of the Government's policy on online safety.

The key to protecting children online is education, empowerment, supervision, and technology solutions informed by research and consultation. A national coordinated approach that includes research, cybersafety education, effective policing of illegal content and appropriate technology solutions is required to meet the challenges of online harassment and security issues.

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