

Strengthening seas and shores: Building a shared path for integrated coastal management in Ticao–Burias Pass

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In October 2025, a series of meetings, site visits, and focus group discussions with local government units (LGUs), national agencies, people’s organisations, and coastal communities highlighted a shared commitment: to protect the seascape of Ticao–Burias Pass Protected Seascape (TBPPS) while sustaining livelihoods that depend on it. From municipal halls to fishing communities, and from mangrove forests to marine sanctuaries, the conversations reveal both the richness of its coastal and marine resources and the complexity of managing them.

These engagements formed part of the *Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas in Large Marine Ecosystems in the ASEAN Region* (ASEAN ENMAPS) Project’s efforts to understand on-the-ground realities and capacity needs and support more coherent, inclusive, and science-based coastal and marine governance.



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Kick-off meeting with local government officials in Legazpi, Albay, Bicol.

Setting the context: Aligning visions for TBPPS

At the outset, the ASEAN ENMAPS Project Management Unit (PMU) presented the project's objectives, components, and expected outcomes, emphasising strengthened marine protected area (MPA) management, capacity development, and regional knowledge sharing.

The role of PEMSEA (Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia) was underscored, particularly its support for integrated coastal management (ICM), results from the initial capacity development needs assessment, and the purpose of the site visits: to listen, learn, and co-develop pathways forward with local stakeholders.

The Protected Area Superintendent's Office and local partners, including the Ticao Island MPA Network (TIMPAN), shared updates on existing management plans, initiatives, and persistent challenges—from enforcement gaps and limited resources to the need for stronger coordination across local government units (LGUs) and sectors.

A recurring question quickly surfaced: *How can local ICM and coastal resource management (CRM) plans be harmonised with the broader TBPPS Management Plan, while remaining responsive to LGU mandates and community needs?*

Bridging plans and practice: The ICM challenge

Across discussions, LGUs reiterated that ICM is expected to be implemented at the local level, yet many municipalities still lack an ICM or CRM Plan. Although national agencies have required the mainstreaming of ICM into Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) and Comprehensive Development Plans (CDPs), support has often been limited to data requirements rather than hands-on technical guidance on the implementation of the ICM programme and mainstreaming the “integration” principles, including the coordination of different sectors and stakeholders, and harmonisation of plans, programmes, and activities for the sustainable, climate-smart, gender-responsive, and inclusive development in the coastal area.

This gap was evident in Pilar municipality, where local officials acknowledged limited familiarity with the ridge-to-reef approach and the absence of both ICM and CRM Plans. Similar needs were echoed in Donsol, Magallanes, and Castilla where LGUs expressed the urgency of developing ICM and marine spatial planning (MSP) processes that integrate land and sea uses—fisheries, aquaculture, habitats, tourism, ports, settlements, and disaster risk reduction—into a coherent framework.

For TBPPS as a whole, stakeholders raised the need for:

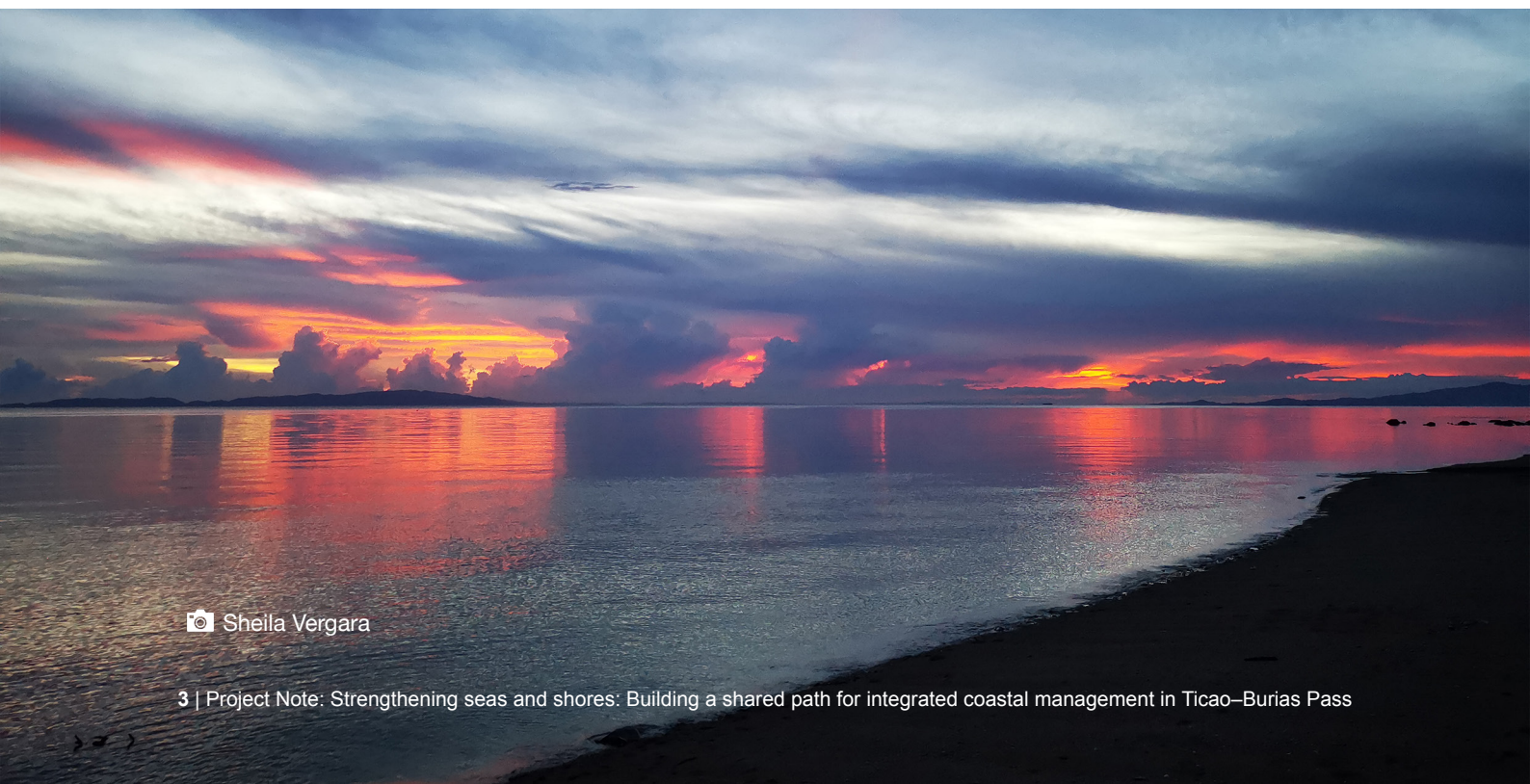
- Developing local ICM/CRM Plans and harmonising with the TBPPS Management Plan. Likewise, LGUs in Ticao Island need to develop their ICM plans and harmonise with the TIMPAN Management Plan and TBPPS Management Plan;
- Conducting MSP at the seascape scale to address overlapping uses, ecological connectivity, and cumulative impacts; and
- Strengthening the capacity of protected area management offices to facilitate coordination among more than 200 Protected Area Management Board members and stakeholders, improve management at local and seascape levels and the enforcement of policies and regulations, and enhance sustainable livelihoods.

On the frontlines: Enforcement, fisheries, and MPAs

From *Bantay Dagat* (Sea Patrol) teams to fisherfolk leaders, enforcement emerged as both a priority and a persistent challenge. Community-based sea patrols have contributed to tangible gains, such as increased fish biomass and coral cover in some MPAs in Magallanes; however, capacity constraints remain widespread.

Many LGUs reported limited boats, aging equipment, and reliance on job-order personnel. The need for faster patrol boats, communication equipment, navigation tools, and sustained training was repeatedly pointed out. ASEAN ENMAPS project's commitment to support patrol boats was welcomed as a critical step toward strengthening monitoring, control, and surveillance.

Sustainable fisheries management was featured prominently. In several municipalities, overfishing and market pressures, particularly involving sardines (*tamban/lawlaw*), have led to falling prices, excess catch dumping, and water pollution, which undermine both fisheries and seaweed farming. Calls for a unified TBPPS-wide ordinance on fishing gear regulations, mesh sizes, and closed and open seasons reflected a growing recognition that fragmented rules are insufficient for a shared seascape.





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Provision of alternative livelihood programmes was also raised as this could help reduce fishing pressures and contribute to the protection of habitats and MPAs. Equally important was the call to address value addition and market dynamics: improving fish processing, cold storage, packaging, and access to buyers, while finding ways to reduce fisherfolk dependence on traders and brokers who control prices.

Habitats at risk, nature-based solutions ahead

Field visits and community dialogues revealed pressing concerns about habitat degradation. Seagrass beds and coral reefs in several areas lack explicit protection zones, while mangrove restoration efforts continue to struggle with low survival rates due to inappropriate species selection, exposure to waves, and human pressures.

LGUs and communities expressed strong interest in nature-based solutions (i.e. from mangrove and riparian restoration to hybrid shoreline protection) particularly in areas affected by coastal erosion, storm surges, and flooding. In Pilar, a partially built seawall became a concrete reminder of the need for better-designed, ecosystem-based approaches that work with, rather than against, natural processes.

Across municipalities, stakeholders highlighted the need for:

- Mapping and assessment of coastal habitats;
- Clear zoning for mangroves, seagrass, and coral reefs to ensure their protection;
- Training on “right species, right site” mangrove planting; and
- Stronger integration of habitat protection into MSP, ICM/CRM, CLUPs, CDPs, and disaster risk reduction plans.



Partially built seawall in Pilar, Sorsogon

Pollution, sanitation, and the source-to-sea reality

Solid waste and wastewater management emerged as cross-cutting challenges affecting ecosystems, fisheries, tourism, and public health. Despite local initiatives—from “no segregation, no collection” policies to coastal clean-ups—many LGUs face limited collection coverage, lack of sanitary landfills, high tipping fees, and insufficient technical staff.

Wastewater and septage management gaps were particularly stark. Open defecation is still happening due to lack of toilets. In several coastal communities, untreated greywater and poorly designed septic tanks discharge directly into rivers and coastal waters, contributing to siltation, algal growth, and declining water quality. LGUs repeatedly called for support in preparing septage and wastewater management plans and feasibility studies; knowledge sharing on impacts of poor sanitation; and technology, financing, and cost recovery options; and access to financing and technical partnerships.

People at the centre: Livelihoods, awareness, and inclusion

Beyond plans and infrastructure, the discussions consistently returned to people. Fisherfolk, women, and community leaders spoke about the difficulty of complying with regulations when alternative livelihoods are limited. Although men often prefer fish-related enterprises, women highlighted opportunities in food processing, farming, handicrafts, and tourism services—provided they receive training in business management, marketing, and access to markets.

Capacity development needs extended beyond technical skills to communication, education, and public awareness. Communities expressed confusion over MPA boundaries, fishing seasons, and regulations, underscoring the importance of clear information, consistent enforcement, and participatory governance.

Charting the way forward

Taken together, the meetings and site visits across Pilar, Donsol, Magallanes, and Castilla painted a nuanced picture: one of dedicated local actors navigating complex ecological, economic, and institutional realities. The message is clear: effective management of the TBPPS requires not only plans and policies, but also sustained investment in people, partnerships, shared learning, and capacity development.

Through ASEAN ENMAPS, there is a growing opportunity to:

- Support LGUs in developing and harmonising ICM, MSP, fisheries, solid waste and wastewater, and climate action plans;
- Develop and strengthen MPA networks and enforcement through equipment, training, public awareness campaigns, and coordination;
- Promote sustainable fisheries and diversified livelihoods grounded in ecosystem health; and
- Foster a truly ridge-to-reef, source-to-sea approach that connects forests, farms, rivers, coasts, and communities.

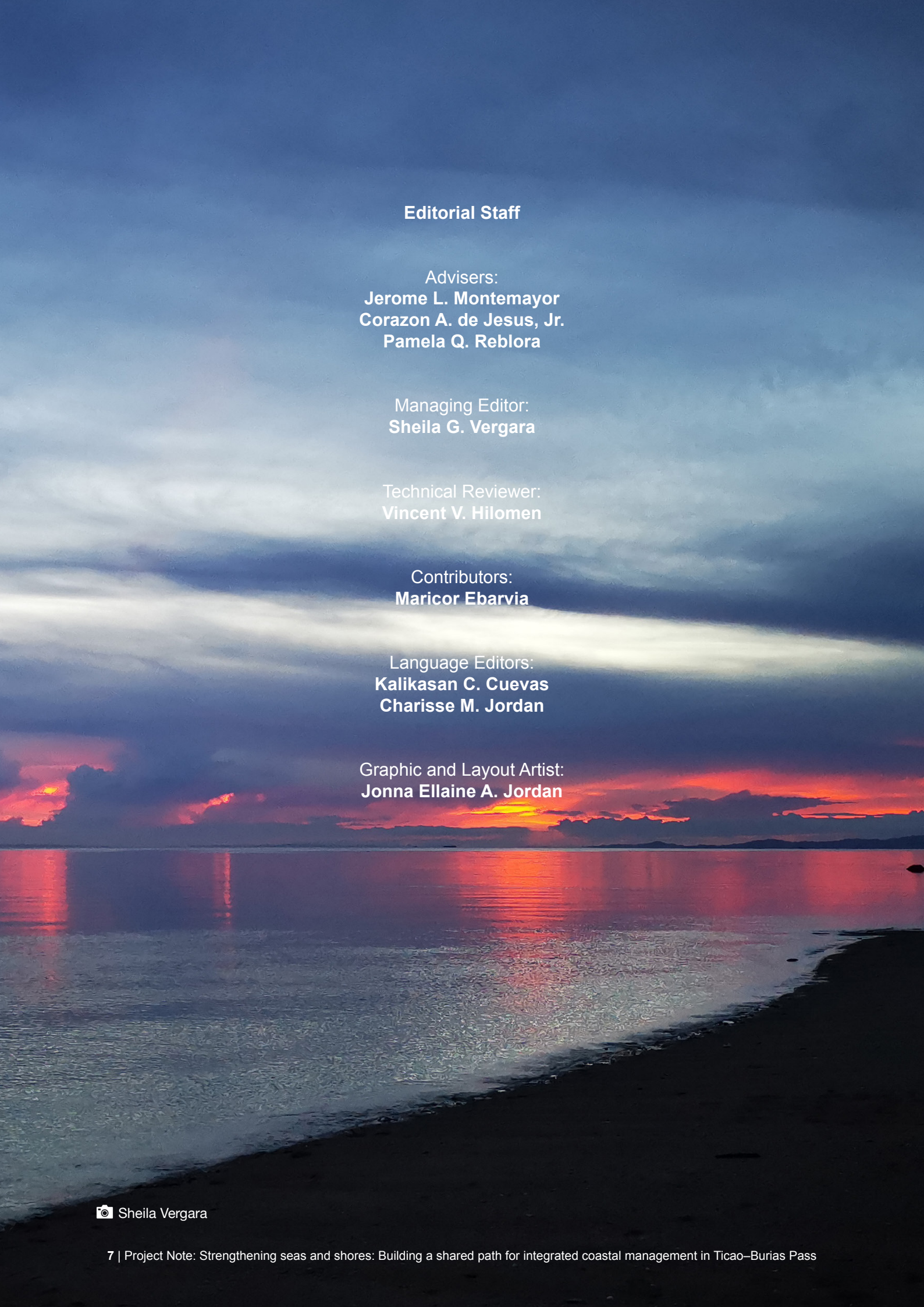
As one seascape, TBPPS is more than the sum of its municipalities. Its future depends on collective action where local and traditional knowledge, scientific guidance, and local and regional cooperation come together to ensure that healthy seas continue to sustain fisheries, biodiversity, and the people who call these shores home.

The project *Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas in Large Marine Ecosystems in the ASEAN region (ASEAN ENMAPS)* aims to improve marine protected area network management in key Large Marine Ecosystems across Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. It applies science-based strategies to conserve biodiversity and sustain fisheries. The project also aims to strengthen governance, build the capacity of stakeholders, promote knowledge sharing, and advance sustainable financing for long-term conservation. ASEAN ENMAPS is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme through the funding of the Global Environment Facility, and with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity as the executing agency.

For inquiries about the ASEAN ENMAPS Project, contact:
ASEAN ENMAPS Project Secretariat
enmaps@aseanbiodiversity.org

For more information, log on to enmaps.aseanbiodiversity.org

Contact us at:
ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity
D.M. Lantican Avenue
University of the Philippines
Los Banos, Laguna, Philippines 4031
contact.us@aseanbiodiversity.org



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