

Then and Now—Women in Norway's Fisheries

Twenty-five years after the introduction of the quota system, significant challenges confront women in Norway's fisheries

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Norway is considered to be one of the largest fishery nations in Europe. Despite this, there are few professional women fishers in the country. According to statistical data released in 2017 by the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries for 2016 (which this article mainly draws upon), the number of full-time women fishers in Norway was 274 compared to more than 9,000 full-time men fishers. Fishing and fishery politics have been so male dominated in Western societies that researchers have characterised fishing in general, and the quota system, introduced in Norway in 1990, in particular, as a patriarchal system. Women registered as fishers may be few but they have, particularly in the past, participated in fishing, performing tasks like baiting the long-lines, washing the boat, doing administration work or helping to deliver fish at the fish plants. In some cases, they were, and are, fishing near the coast. These days, women work outside fisheries and bring home an important salary. They still continue to shoulder household and community responsibilities. Women thus contribute to the efficiency of the fisheries, increase the security of fishing households and serve as an important link connecting fish boat, household and community.

Interestingly, in contrast to the farming sector in the country, in Norway's fisheries, women's work, regardless of the type of work, does not make them eligible for membership in fishermen's associations. This may be one of the main reasons why issues related to women in the fisheries seldom find discussion in important official policy papers.

As a researcher interested in gender questions and women's rights, I find the absence of gender issues in fishery politics rather strange in a country that has been noted by the World Economic Forum in 2017 for its politics of equality. In fact, for years, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) placed special emphasis on gender in the overseas projects they financed. However, if a gender perspective were to be properly applied, women and men contributing to fishing would deserve the same rights, independent of where they carried out their fishing tasks.

In many of my previous articles since the 1970s, I have focused on women in fishery households and communities. In this article, I will focus on women as fishers in small-scale coastal fishing. I will also try to point to some factors that can help to explain the low number of registered women fishers. Finally, I will end with examples of changes that have taken place and that may lead to improving the situation of women fishers in Norway.

In contrast to the number of male fishers, the number of registered women fishers in Norway has always been low. The number of women registered as primary or full-time fishers was highest (about 580) just before and just after 1990 when Norway introduced the quota system in coastal fishing. These numbers also included women working on ocean-going factory skips. In all, full-time and part-time women fishers accounted for only 3.1 per cent of registered fishers in Norway in 2016, and clearly, with only a few exceptions, they can be considered as a minority in the primarily male world of fishing.

The majority of full-time fishers are found in three of Norway's northernmost counties. In 2016, in the county of Nordland, there were 66 women and 2,191 men registered as fishers; in Troms, there were 28 women and 1,028 men; and in Finnmark, 57 women and 1,088. In the county of Møre and Romsdal

ANNE-LISE EKREM



The Sami Siida meeting was held in Øvre Alta, Norway and the laavo (the tent) was used as the meeting room where the professional women fishers met for the first time

Women's status can be considered to be akin to that of guests at an all-men's table

in western Norway, 63 women and 1,962 men were registered fishers. Between the years 1990 and 2016, the sharpest increase in the numbers of women who pursued fishing as a primary occupation took place in Finnmark, where the municipality of Nordkapp had the highest number of women fishers. Since their numbers are small women fishers tend to be dispersed amongst the many fishing communities along the long Norwegian coast.

The 2016 data also indicates an age-related decline in the numbers of women fishers who are most numerous in the age group 20 and 29 years, and progressively decline in numbers as the age range increases.

Women also own coastal fishing boats. In 2016, the number of women boat owners was 118 out of a total of 274 full-time women fishers. The corresponding number of male boat owners was 5,836 out of a total of 9,137 full-time male fishers. Even though both women and men own boats, the majority of owners are men.

Today, when coastal fishery is regulated by quotas, fishers have to reckon with the fact that politicians have a strong influence on the quota system since the size of a quota is set by the Directorate after consultation with fishery politicians and researchers. The quota system today is organised in a closed and open group and the quotas are allocated per boat and not per person. In 2016, fishers controlled 1,779 fishing permits in the closed group, and 1,493 of the permit holders were registered as residents in northern Norway. However, few women owned a boat with a quota in the closed group. In Nordland for instance, three women owned a boat with a quota in the closed group, two women in Troms, and eight in the northern most county of Finnmark. A quota in the closed group, as opposed to a quota in the open group, can be bought and sold, and can therefore represent a high value. According to local fishers in Finnmark, in 2017, quotas in the closed group belonging to boats between 10 and 10.99 metres could be sold for anything between USD 150,000 to 200,000. The high quota price is therefore a drawback for newcomers who want to buy a quota. Few women are able to afford this investment. Most women participate therefore in open group fishing. When a fisher in the open group stops fishing, the quota is returned to the Directorate of Fisheries which then redistributes them to new fishers. Norway also has an arrangement of recruitment quotas for people 30 years of age or younger. Annually, 10 to 15 recruitment quotas in the

closed group are allocated. Till date, only one woman has been allocated a quota under this arrangement.

Given the low numbers of women fishers, and the lack of formal acceptance for shore work by women, their status can be considered to be akin to that of guests at an all-men's table.

Why are there so few women fishers in a fishery nation like Norway? There are many reasons for the relatively low numbers not only of women fishers but also of women who are boat owners, and owners of closed group quota boats.

One explanation could be that fishing is a profession with a strong division of labour between women's and men's work. This division of labour is embedded in the fishery culture and seldom questioned. This was understandable in earlier days when both women's and men's work was hard and time-consuming, and their way of life could be defined as a peasant way of life with low commercialisation and little formal organisation. In Norway, many of the social welfare rights are based on paid work. Therefore, when the welfare system was introduced in Norway, mainly after World War II, it was men fishers' paid work that was registered in the tax files, providing a basis for holiday allowances, sickness compensations and pensions. Women's contributions were not taken into consideration except for some of the general welfare rights, like a minimum pension, that all Norwegian citizens are entitled to. Such a division of labour was also supported by an education system that perpetuated the notion of a gender divided fishery.

Furthermore, unionising in the fisheries fell into the male domain. The different fishermen's associations through the years had few women as full members. The exception is of women from the western part of Norway who own bigger vessels. They have been active in Norges Fiskarlag, participating in many relevant subsections and meeting. The fishermen's associations limited themselves to questions of resources, fish prices, payment, and relations to fish buyers and to the government. Women's issues were not problematised.

When women within the sector organised, they came together as members of associations for improving local peoples' health, or working for the temperance movement, and sometimes in Christian organisations. In the beginning, few became members of labour unions. With such gendered patterns, women from fishing

households had, and continue to have, negligible influence on fishing politics, while they are important actors in developing the economic and social life of the fishery households and communities. Fiskarkvinnelaget or The Fisherwomen's Association, which functioned from 1953 to 2011, and was associated with Norges Fiskarlag, organised women living in fishing villages, working hard to improve the social and cultural conditions in their communities, as well as putting fisherpeople's safety and security on the agenda.

The gender division in politics has impacted the content of official policy papers. The political decisions reveal a lack of cognizance of women's issues and gender perspectives. Most of the governmental white and green papers build on the notion that fishing is a male occupation, with little thought given to the fact that the boat, the household and the community are all strongly interconnected. This can also be related to the fact that during the post-war years in Western societies, married, adult women were strongly connected to the concept of 'housewives'.

Even up to now there is evidence that the official decisions excluding women's concerns have led to worsening conditions for fishing families. For instance, women took the initiative in nation wide political actions as part of the Coastal Women's Action in 1989, when the cod moratorium was launched. Such actions sought to defend the rights of coastal fishing households and communities, and oppose privatisation of fishery resources. However, when the Norwegian Minister of Fishery and Coastal Affairs in 2004 closed down the Regulation Committee that was mandated to advice on quota regulation, a lack of female representation in this Committee was given as the cause. A few years later, when Committee discussions around quotas were resumed, the official requirement of participation of at least 40 per cent women was dispensed with.

The lack of a gender perspective in policy-making means that the concerns of women are not taken into account, particularly the difficulties they face in combining fishing and motherhood and other caring duties in the household. Further, women seeking to go into fishing also face many obstacles on cultural, economic and social fronts. These factors explain why many of the young women who started in fishing in recent times have quit. While in other industries, gender concerns have been sought to be addressed, this concern has been totally lacking in the fishery

sector. Despite the hurdles that women face in fishing as well as in running their households, their participation in community and other organisational activities demonstrate how they continue to be a force in many situations in the sector. Positive interventions, from the government, from the society in general and from the fishery population are therefore needed to support the participation of fisher women. The following highlight some possibilities.

Since the 1989 Coastal Women's Action campaign, much has changed. Women have joined other action groups fighting for the rights of small-scale fisheries and against privatisation. Some have also become members of political parties. In fact, between 2005 and 2015 all the Ministers of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs were women. However, they too put little or no emphasis on the situation of women fishers.

Another change that took place after the Coastal Women's Action campaign was that the Directorate of Fisheries, through the intervention of some concerned civil servants, opened up options for women wanting to register as a full-time or a part-time fisher. They recognised the roles of women engaged in baiting long-lines, maintaining boats, helping deliver catch, and assisting their fisher husbands in the administration of the boat. By recognising this supportive role of women, a barrier was broken to their being registered as fishers. Examples from Finnmark show that opening up the registration to women even gave opportunities to women from abroad, sometimes married to local fishers, to gain rights as registered fishers.

Another example is the Action Plan for Women in Marine Sector, initiated by the Ministries of Fisheries and of Family and Equality Affairs. This initiative followed the disbandment of the Regulation Committee in 2004.

The plan focused on the low numbers of women fishers and women in aquaculture, and aimed to increase the number of women fishers to three per cent by 2010, four per cent by 2015, and eight per cent by 2020. The weakness of the plan was that no specific road map or implementation strategy was specified. The responsibility for implementation was in the hands of the participating institutions. Norway therefore remains far from reaching the Plan's objectives.

During the spring of 2017, the question of women's participation became an issue, through the intervention of the local and fishery media. A young woman fisher from Finnmark

Experience shows that it is difficult to bring changes in a profession that is so closely connected to men's work and masculinity, locally, nationally and internationally

met with opposition and scepticism from fishers and the traditional fishing community, when she bought her own boat in 2016. After a vibrant discussion in the media, another woman fisher, Trude Karlsen Halvorsen, took the initiative to call a meeting for women fishers.

In May 2017, more than 15 women met in Alta supported by some of the fishery organisations. At the meeting, they exchanged experiences and discussed how they could organise. The result was the formation of the Forum for kvinnelige yrkesfiskere (Forum for Professional Women Fishers) headed by Trude Karlsen Halvorsen. They formed a Facebook group, and one of the participants, Anne-Lise Ekrem, also launched a weblog (see <http://rosabloegger.blogg.no/>).

The participants in the meeting at Alta decided not to form a separate fisheries association. They continue to work as a forum. They decided to join already existing organisations, like the Norges Fiskarlag (Fishermen's Association). Subsequently, some of the Forum representatives met with representatives of Norges Fiskarlag, who showed willingness to work with issues of special concern for women fishers. These included recruitment of women in fisheries, access to finance for women fishers, and the special challenges of being a fisher or boat owner and a mother with young children.

The Forum has focused on other problems as well. For instance, it has been in communication with Norwegian Labour and

Welfare Administration (NAV), an important public institution dealing with a wide range of welfare rights. The results of this engagement are yet to materialise.

To conclude, the experiences from earlier initiatives show that there is a long way to go to go to realise the rights of women fishers, especially in a period of professionalisation, regulation and privatisation. However, this is a period when the income from fishing is relatively good, compared to women's income from other employment and opportunities elsewhere, and more women than earlier are considering taking up fishing. There is therefore the need to press with these initiatives.

Experience shows that it is difficult to bring changes in a profession that is so closely connected to men's work and masculinity, locally, nationally and internationally. The Forum with its young and hard-working women members can, however, make a difference.

Fortunately, they are not alone in this journey. Internationally, women, as well as some men and some institutions, are aware of the importance of women's participation and contribution to the fishery sector and fishery communities. The combined efforts of all these concerned groups can result in better opportunities and working conditions for women in the sector, more women-oriented fishery politics and policy-making, and greater representation for women in influential positions. ❏

Taking along the 'crewmembers'

The article argues for the need to develop a women-friendly fisheries policy based on dialogue with women of fisheries communities

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We are now in 2008—a year with fewer men and women registered in Norway's fishing industry than there were last year. In the beginning of 2007, fishing was the main occupation of 10,797 persons and the secondary occupation of 2,771 others. The start of 2008 has seen the numbers in these sectors declining by 143 and 92 respectively.

The numbers of women registered as fishers, never high to begin with, are continuously dwindling. In 1990, there were 554 women in fishing as primary occupation as against 19,921 men, and 112 women in fishing as a secondary



occupation as against 6,931 men. While figures for 2007 are not available, during 2006, the numbers of women in fishing as a primary occupation had declined to 263, and as a secondary occupation, to 102.

The ownership of fishing boats reveals similar trends. Of about 3,000 fishing boats, sized between 10 and 27.99 metres, only 23 are owned by women. This also means that very few women enjoy a boat quota.

This tendency is repeated in onshore fish production, which employs only 9,482 workers today as against 13,941 in 2000. Here, the proportion of women has declined from 44 per cent in 2000 to 41 percent today. The number of women in aquaculture is not increasing either. Women's participation has grown only in the

sectors of research, consultancy and marketing. However, there is little statistical data on this.

Imbalanced gender representation in the fisheries has been a matter of great concern for many, among them the Minister for Equality and Family Affairs in Norway's "Centre/Conservative" government: Laila Dāvøy. In 2005, she called for a meeting with the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs to seek ways of increasing the proportion of women in the fisheries and aquaculture in compliance with Norway's Gender Equality Act.

In 2006, Helga Pedersen, a woman minister from the "Red/Green" government, took the initiative to establish a committee consisting of five women and three men from fishworkers unions and organizations, owners of aquaculture plants and fishmongers. Represented in the committee was the 'Fisherwomen's Association', a voluntary organization that works for the social and economic rights of fisherwomen and fishing families. Also represented were the Ministry for Equality and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs.

The committee was asked to come up with suggestions to increase the proportion of women in the fishing industry, in fishery-related public committees as well as in public administration. In August 2007, the committee presented the Action Plan for Increased Proportion of Women in the Marine Sector (hereafter referred to as the Action Plan). The report is currently under review.

The Action Plan formulated several goals in accordance with its mandate to increase gender representation in fisheries.

It suggested the incremental increase in the number of female fishers from 2.6 per cent in 2006 to 3 per cent in 2010, 4 per cent in 2015 and 8 per cent in 2020. Several action plans were recommended: consciousness-raising to promote gender balance; incentives for marine enterprises; strengthening recruitment to the marine sector; greater publicity on fisheries among the youth; increasing the visibility of women in the marine sector; and finally, recruiting women to positions of leadership.

The committee made several suggestions in line with the action plans. These include creating a dedicated internet site; appointing special 'ambassadors' to advocate gender equality in the marine sector; awarding incentives and prizes for outstanding achievements in marine fisheries, and sensitizing local leaders to gender equality issues. It recommended financial support for

female entrepreneurship in the sector, and preference for female applicants in the grant of aquaculture licences. It also advocated better entrepreneurial training opportunities in educational institutions and the induction of more women in decision-making roles.

The Action Plan suggested that the responsibility for achieving the proposed goals would rest with the Ministry of Fishery and Coastal Affairs, together with other public institutions and partners in the marine sector.

This Action Plan, is however, not Norway's first. In 1990, politically-active women took the initiative to create the first action plan for the marine sector. A Fishery Industry's Committee for Women was established and financed by the Ministry of Fisheries until the year 2000. Thereafter, the Fisheries Minister from the conservative party suggested that the task be transferred to another committee: The Committee of Competence for the Fishery Sector. In 2002, the same minister proposed that various partners in the marine sector could finance the committee and its work, a suggestion that was rejected by the marine sector. Since then, there has been no co-ordinating body. The 2007 Action Plan discusses the establishment of such a committee, but does not recommend it.

My experience with the sector, both as an outsider engaged in research and as an insider having personal connections with people in many coastal areas in North Norway, suggests that much has to be done by the community's women and men in order to reach these goals. While the initiative taken by the Minister of Fisheries is a positive first step, what about implementation? Will the Minister be able to pull along "crewmembers" from the Ministry and the different organizations? Would they be willing to put in resources?

The emphasis on professionalizing the industry as recommended in the Action Plan must also be called to question. Fisheries is a way of life and culture; the so-called professional fisheries activities cannot be viewed independently from the ways in which fishery households and communities are organized. Powerful interventions are needed at the household and community levels in order to combat male-dominated structures in the marine sector. The first step would necessarily involve a continuous dialogue with women in the sector whose needs and aspirations must determine the direction for fisheries in general.

This dialogue would necessarily involve women from the Fisherwomen's Association and other women's associations. However, to hear the voices of young unmarried women, who are seldom organized in the same way as the middle-aged and elderly women are, other organizing principles have to be developed. Perhaps focus group discussions in different

parts of the country could be held. Women's voices must be heard and their problems must be put on the political agenda.

Norway's Fisheries Minister, like many young women in the fisheries sector, is well-educated; she comes from a farming-fishing family, and, since she has expressed the wish to settle in her home village in Finnmark, perhaps she would be most suited to the task of arranging continuous dialogues among women in fisheries. The aim should be to develop better gender balance, and, in the long run, a more women-friendly fisheries policy! ❖

"Fisheries is a way of life and culture; the so-called professional fisheries activities cannot be viewed independently from the ways in which fishery households and communities are organized."

Ancient food for future generations...

Sherry Pictou

This poem is dedicated to the struggles of clam fishers in Canada against the privatization of fishing areas

My heart is overflowing
with Grandma Sarah
teaching us to dig clams
and as she wraps all of our harvest
in foil over the heated coals
beneath the sand
I knew this was for me
and my lifetime...

And those life times
before and after me
where shell heaps
bare the answers to our existence
in both life and death...

The clam... the beautiful clam
hidden within its intergenerational
purple blue shell:
the food of life --
ancient food for future generations....

Oh my brother...
So contented as you walk slowly
the back roads....
With your bucket full of clams
and clam hack...

So serene and quiet
this walk of ancient paths
You carrying
so quietly
the ancestral knowledge
which the rest of us --
were too self absorbed
in the fast paced of tomorrow
thus not able to learn or feel
with our hearts, today....

I see you there
with your shucking knife
and for a second
trying to teach me....
As Your ancient laughter
of fathers and grandfathers
before you...

Ring loud to this day
in my heart of all hearts
as I struggled to learn
this art now floating along
bay shores and inlets...
and continue to do so...
Today....

Europe/Norway

Women, men and fishing quotas

The professionalization of the coastal fishing fleet and the introduction of fish quotas have further marginalized women in the fishing industry of Norway

by Siri Gerrard of the Department of Planning and Community Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway

In most Western industrialized countries, fishing is considered a male profession; for, in most cases, both fishers and fishing boatowners are men. Yet, the existence and contributions of female fishers are not in doubt; feminist researchers, particularly, have documented women's fishing-related activities that ensure good harvest and the viability of fishing households in many communities. A continuing feature of these female activities is that they are mostly supportive of fishermen's activities, and remain unpaid, unregistered, unrecognized and invisible outside local communities. Unseen work is generally uncoun- ted, unrewarded and outside the realm of public planning and action; in Norway and other Nordic welfare countries, social rights and opportunities are connected exclusively to paid and statistically visible work. Thus, cases abound of mismatch between fisherwomen's work and their public welfare rights, such as sickness allowance, wages, and unemployment and pension benefits.

The introduction of the fishing quota system in 1990, following a nine-and-half month cod moratorium in the northern part of Norway, has had tremendous impact on the livelihoods of fisherfolk. In this article, I intend to focus on the gender dimension of this quota system.

Before addressing the relationship between gender and fishing quotas, it is perhaps important to begin with an outline of gender distribution in the Norwegian fishing industry. In 2004, while 281 women and 12,396 men were registered as full-time fishers, 114 women and 2,795 men were fishing on part-time basis. In 1990, there were 554 women and 19,921 men as full-time fishers, and 112 women and 6,931

men as part-time fishers. In a sense, while the number of full-time women fishers decreased by 50 per cent, there was stability in the population of part-time fishers. Full-time male fishers decreased by nearly 38 per cent in relation to an almost 60 per cent decrease in part-time male fishers. Several reasons could be adduced for these downward trends. But there seems to be a direct correlation between the quota system and the number of fishers; the women and/or men, who have left the fishing, were not replaced.

Since the quota system was introduced, the quantity of fish landed has varied from year to year. For 2006, the total allowable catch (TAC) of cod was 240,000 tonnes. Such TAC is shared among the coastal fleet and the ocean-going boats according to a fixed percentage, which is often challenged, especially by the coastal fishers.

Norway operates a system of non-transferable boat quotas. This means that quotas cannot be sold; fishing quotas follow the boat. Full-time fishers, who have been registered for a year or more, can buy a boat with a quota that belongs to a category referred to as Group 1. Part-time fishers too can buy boats in Group 2. Since the available fish for the entire fleet in Group 2 is fixed, fishers are required to cease fishing when they exhaust their quotas, unless they live in the most fishery-dependent areas of Tromsø and Finnmark in northern Norway. In principle, the quantity of fish available to boats in Group 2 is less than in Group 1.



In 1990, when the quota system was introduced, boats in Group 1 had quotas for cod, haddock and saithe, the most valuable fish species in northern Norway. The length of fishing boats was also relevant in deciding the size of the quota. This model has since been changed; registered full-time fishers can now simultaneously buy and own several boats with quotas. They can also rent a quota or a boat with a quota, and rent out a quota or a boat with a quota. In both 2005 and 2006, boats smaller than 10 m in Group 1 were able to harvest more cod in relation to boats between 10 m and 15 m in size. The reason is that many boats in Group 1, smaller than 10 m, were scrapped. Quotas of such scrapped boats were then transferred to the remaining similar-sized boats in Group 1.

Since fishing quotas are related to boat ownership, gender is a relevant tool for comparison.

In 2005, throughout Norway, 161 women and 7,386 men were registered as owning boats smaller than 28 m, with an owner share of more than 49.99 per cent. In Group 1, women owned 11 of the registered boats, compared to 2,417 boats for men.

It is particularly interesting to compare the data trend with previous years. In 1994, 192 boats out of a total of 16,216 were registered in the name of women. Fifteen boats with quotas were registered in the name of full-time female fishers, compared to 3,382 for men, while 148 women and 3,774 men owned boats with quotas in Group 2.

Furthermore, from 1994 to 2005, there was an absolute decrease in boat-owning women and men in both Groups 1 and 2. In terms of percentage, however, the decrease in male owners was considerably higher. Also, the heavy gender imbalance in ownership of boats and quotas persisted. The right to fish, which, before 1990, was open to both women and men, has now practically become men's preserve. These findings clearly indicate that women own and control a limited share of fishing quotas in Norway, a country that is otherwise considered a symbol of gender equality.

Many mutually reinforcing reasons possibly underlie these glaring gender imbalances. But I will propose

only a couple of assumptions or hypotheses for further discussion or research:

- The price of boats increased when male fishers started buying boats with quotas, creating difficulties for both new male and female fishers.
- Lack of experience and capital poses problems for potential female fishers.
- The quota system has strengthened male dominance in fishing.
- Both gender neutrality and insensitivity in fishery policy have undermined women's ability to buy, own and register boats, and their general involvement in fishing.

In sum, women, who perform unpaid fishing-related tasks are hardly recognized and registered as fishers. There are also indications that the 'market', 'advanced technology' and male fishers have taken over most of women's practical tasks. This is particularly evident in cases where fishers have converted privately owned boats and quotas into private limited companies - a fairly recent ownership model for small-scale fishing boats in northern Norway. Few of these limited-liability companies related to boats below 15 m in size, have women on their governing boards. In cases where women have fisher-husbands, they still continue as discussion partners, motivators and in other statistically invisible roles, which clearly represent work without any formal rights and benefits.

These tendencies show that professionalization of the coastal fishing fleet and the commodification of fishing rights through the quota system, have not benefited women. I agree thus with researchers who hold the view that the quota system reflects a hegemonic model, which is reminiscent of the "recent international neoliberal consensus". This model advocates a market-based restructuring of economic and environmental policies, as well as the medium of social communication and life. In countries where the quota system has been adopted, there have been serious consequences not only for female fishers and fishing-related women, but also for male fishers, whose numbers are showing a heavy decrease.

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