

Making Things Happen in Debian

Changelog, Methods, Lessons Learned

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Fun fact: Local media coverage

- It took two days until Sruthi was *in Indian media*
- It took more than two years until I made it into German media.

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FAQ

Q: How does it feel to be an ex-DPL?

A: You have to be a former DPL to know.

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Agenda

- 1 DPL Changelog
- 2 Methods
- 3 Lessons learned

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Progress

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2024-08: Bug of the Day

- Initial idea: Demonstrate how to fix bugs to newcomers
- Migrate packages to Salsa, Debian's collaboration platform
- Pick packages with long-overdue uploads
- Doing something *and* talking to people was essential for progress

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2025-01: Stop posting on X

- Publicity team no longer posts on X
- Platform no longer aligned with our values
- Don't feed it our valuable content

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2025-10: Creating Archive and DFSG team

- Historically grown situation changed thanks to a hint born inside the team
- Splitting responsibilities of distinct tasks
- Timed to follow the Trixie release
- Faster processing
- Make new processing more transparent
- Fresh blood with new ideas turned into code
- Example: more licenses in
`/usr/share/common-licenses`

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2026-01: Empty delegation of Data Protection team

- All previous members stated to step back — and insisted on publishing this
- Responsible and transparent handover
- ... even if triggering *lots* of unhelpful offers to help from non-DDs
- Solved by naming the problem publicly

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2026-04: Refreshing delegations

- Discussion came up on debian-private with good arguments
- Announced in Bits (2026-02)
- Confirmed by DPL candidate on debian-vote (2026-03)
- More controversial than expected
- Governance is hard
- Silence is hard to parse

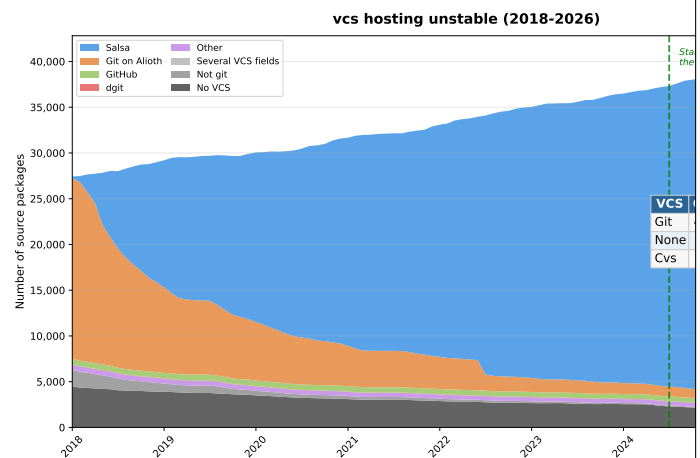
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Collaborative maintenance

- Salsa: our main collaboration platform:
1700 out of 41583 source packages missing (4.09%)
2026-05-10: 1910 out of 40558 source packages missing (4.71%)
- Professionalism in process is what makes volunteer projects scale
- Strict maintainership: historically sensible, increasingly a source of friction
- Hard to know whether package orphaned or just needs no work
- Silence was hard to interpret and hard to accept for me
- I pushed too hard without seeking consensus first

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Vcs hosting in unstable



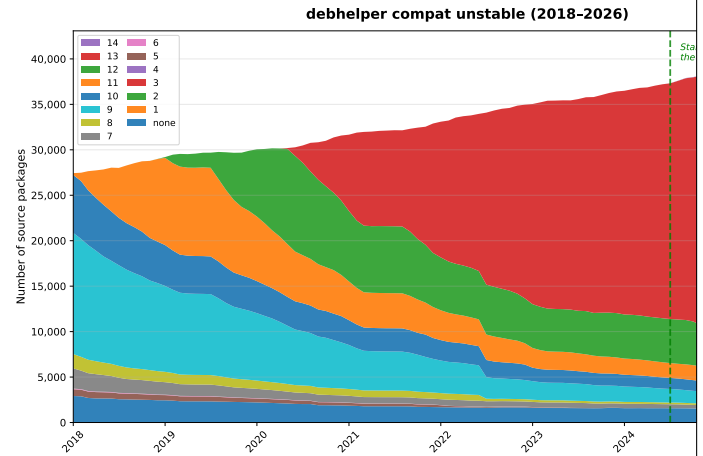
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Package modernisation trends

- Migration to short-form dh rules
- Widespread adoption of debhelper compat 13
- DEP5 copyright
- cdb's removed from unstable

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Debhelper compat level, no cdb's



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Failed to change: Loosen strict ownership of packages

Debian is a community — collaboration in packaging tasks remains hard.

Attempts to solve problems caused by strict ownership:

NMU Practiced since 1996 (sharutils 4.2.1-1.1), documented 2002 in developers-reference 3.0 — still constraints

Uploaders Header since 2002-01; 2005: debian-policy 3.6.2.0 enabled team addresses as Maintainer field

MIA MIA handling announced by DAM — reactive, not preventive

ITS Salvage procedure since 2018 — 21+10 days barrier

opts out Suggestion: Flip default, open unless `d/dont_touch_my_package`

DebianCommons Debian Commons team — promising

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Progress

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Review

- Talk to other DDs
- Ask for review

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My usage of LLMs

- Communication in foreign language
- Communication in different cultures
- Controlling emotions
- Focusing on topic
- Neutral interpretation of ambiguous responses

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LLMs — a legitimate tool

- Tool for clarity, not a ghostwriter
- Not depersonalisation but responsibility
- I own the intent — LLM helps with the expression

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Usage of LLMs as editor not author

- I provide a precise description of the situation
- I give a clear definition of my goals
- I write the draft myself
- LLM refines — never generates — my draft
- I review and own the final result

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Results of GR: LLM usage in Debian → permissive

- Proposal 5 “Responsible Use of Generative AI” won
- Existing standards for quality, correctness and maintainability apply
- Other permissive proposals also strong: P2, P4 and P6 defeated all non-permissive proposals
- Preferred: responsible neutrality over additional restrictions or an explicit recommendation to avoid LLMs
- Non-permissive P1 and P3 failed their majority requirements
- P8’s climate argument did not lead to restrictions
- Clear rejection of an LLM ban:
human responsibility, existing standards, *no tool regulation*

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Lessons learned

- Listen carefully to the community
- Select the parts that are promising
- Focus on specific and reachable goals
- Courage to make hard decisions
- Don’t fear pushback
- Ensure cooperation of volunteers who back this decision
- Acknowledge mistakes openly
- Change is possible

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Lessons learned about Debian culture

- Someone steps up and picks up tasks that need doing
- Everyone benefits, we assume the task will be done
- Stepping back gracefully is harder than stepping up
- Positive exception: Data Protection team

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My favourite lesson: Debian Med survived

- Told my team in advance: While serving as DPL I'll stop my Debian Med work
- Good news: Team kept on working
- So I can be sure if I ever stop contributing the team will survive

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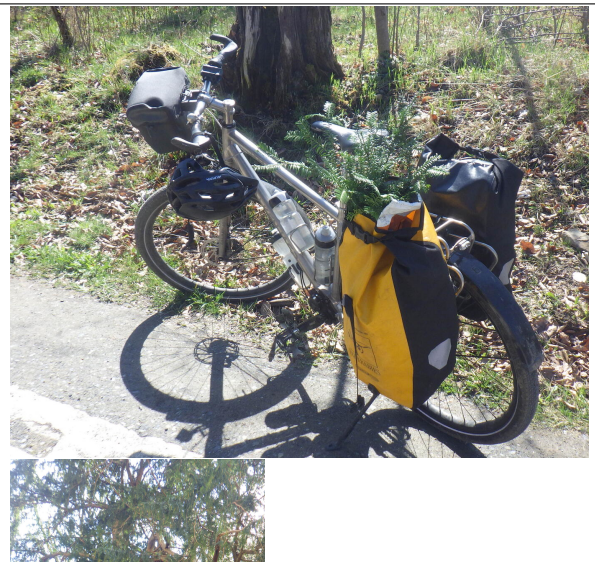
Final lessons

- Opinions are more diverse and divergent than expected
- Whatever I said, the interpretation was "DPL has said"
- It took one year to understand things and another year to change things.

"Everything must change so that everything can stay the same."

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

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