

Writing a good objective

An objective is a statement of what you're aiming to achieve. An objective focuses on the value or values you wish to provide for. All other parts of a regional plan (i.e. policies, rules and other methods) need to stem from an objective. To paraphrase Quality Planning¹, objectives need to:

- Be clear and specific
- Be written in the form of a sentence
- State **what** is to be achieved, **where** and **when**
- Be written so that the objective is able to be assessed

In writing an objective, you should avoid:

- Simply repeating the words of the RMA or other relevant higher level planning document
- Stating **how** the objective is to be achieved (unless it's really important)
- Making the objective too complicated

In the case of the whaitua process, objectives need to be set to provide for values in fresh and coastal water bodies. These objectives may be either written in words or with numbers.

To achieve a narrative or 'higher level' objective, there may be a number of more detailed and specific objectives that need to be met. For example, to provide for healthy and abundant tuna in a particular stream, there may be more specific objectives around the amount of habitat needed for tuna to survive when the stream flow is low, appropriate levels of dissolved oxygen in the stream and passage being possible through any structures in the stream in order that tuna may successfully migrate to the ocean. This linking from the general to the specific is sometimes known as an objectives cascade. An objectives cascade can also flow into showing the limits that would be needed to be met to achieve an objective, and to show the actions to be taken to meet these objectives and limits (see Table 1).

Table 1. Example of an objectives cascade that could apply to a stream in the Ruamāhanga whaitua

Value	General objective	More specific objectives	Even more specific objective	Limits	Management actions
Mahinga kai	Taonga species are present in quantities, sizes and of a quality that is appropriate to enable mana whenua to provide manaaki	Habitat and water quality is provided to ensure a healthy tuna fishery	At MALF, habitat space is maintained to provide xx% protection level for tuna	Allocation limit xx L/s	Maximum amount of water authorised to be taken is allocation limit and no more
				Minimum flow xx L/s	Takes cease at minimum flow
			Fish passage is provided through all structures	NA	Fish passage barriers are removed
		Water quality is suitable for people to safely collect mahinga kai	E. coli levels are maintained at or below xxx cfu/100mL	xx <i>E. coli</i> cfu/100mL maximum	Improve septic tank compliance
				Rules to require stock exclusion	

¹ <http://www.qualityplanning.org.nz/index.php/plan-steps/writing-plans/writing-issues-objectives-and-policies>

What does the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) direct in relation to objectives?

The NPS-FM anticipates that freshwater objectives may be anything from broad and descriptive to specific and directly measurable, though preference is for numbers where possible. When setting objectives in rivers and lakes in the Ruamāhanga whaitua, the NPS-FM contains a series of relevant attributes which must be used in setting objectives. These are:

- Periphyton - Rivers
- Nitrate (toxicity) - Rivers
- Dissolved oxygen - Rivers (downstream of point source discharges only)
- Ammonia (toxicity) – Lakes and rivers
- *E. coli* – Lakes and rivers
- Chlorophyll-a (Phytoplankton) – Lakes
- Total nitrogen – Lakes
- Total phosphorus – Lakes
- *Cyanobacteria* – Lakes and lake fed rivers

These attributes are described in the National Objectives Framework (NOF) in the NPS-FM. The NOF describes attribute 'states' from A (excellent) to D or E (poor).

If an attribute is in the NOF (e.g. periphyton), the freshwater objective for a waterbody must use the NOF attribute states and the objective must be set at a state that is at least the same as the existing water quality, if not better. Where an attribute is not in NOF (e.g. clarity), a freshwater objective must be set to ensure the value that is being protected by the objective is at least no worse than the current state of that water body. Where an attribute is in NOF, freshwater objectives must be set above the national bottom line.

The NPS-FM also states that where periphyton objectives are set, appropriate instream concentrations of dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) and dissolved inorganic phosphorus (DRP) must also be set so that the periphyton objectives are met.

The NPS-FM does not set timeframes for when an objective needs to be met, but does require that timeframes are identified for an objective where improvement is needed.

What does the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) direct in relation to objectives?

The NZCPS does not contain a coastal equivalent of the NOF. It does, however, provide a number of directions to maintain water quality (Objective 1) and improve water quality where it is degraded (Objective 1, Policy 21).

What does the Proposed Natural Resources Plan (PNRP) direct in relation to objectives?

The PNRP provides a regional direction to maintain or improve water quality in both fresh and coastal water bodies. This includes tables which describe the attributes and level of improvement that is sought at a regional scale (Objectives O24 and O25). These tables are useful in providing guidance to the Committee, but do not constrain the Committee's choice of objectives or attributes to use. While the regional objectives will be useful, the purpose of the Committee's work is to move beyond generic regional-scale objectives to more meaningful objectives for the specific water bodies in the Ruamāhanga whaitua.