

# GUIDANCE NOTE

## Policy objectives

Before developing solutions to address a problem, it is important to be clear about the objectives being sought.

### The purpose of objectives

Once you have defined the policy problem and have established there is a case for government action, the next step in the policy cycle is stating the objectives for the proposed policy.

The objectives set out the desirable outcomes of government intervention. Clearly stated objectives can help policy makers in later stages of policy development to:

- identify policy options—understanding the policy objective can help the policy maker focus on policy options which address the defined problem in the most effective and efficient way
- evaluate outcomes—the success, or outcomes, of a policy can be measured against its original objectives.

### Stating the objectives

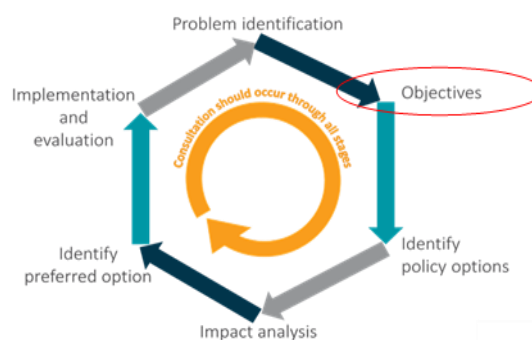
Clearly state the objectives for the policy, keeping in mind the following points.

**Don't confuse ends with means.** State the objectives in terms of 'ends' or outcomes, rather than the 'means' of achieving them. The policy objective is the 'end', or the desirable outcome. Stating an objective by the 'means' narrows the range of policy options and reduces the chances of identifying the option that will effectively address the problem.

*For example, banning something is not an objective. It is one option, or a means to address a problem. By stating an objective in this way, the possible policy options involve ways of implementing a ban, rather than options to address why a ban would be considered in the first place.*

**Government regulation should not be an objective.**

Proposing regulation to address a policy problem is a means of addressing a problem, rather than a desired outcome. Objectives should be broadly defined to allow for all viable options to be considered to solve the problem.



*For example, broadly defined objectives should promote consideration of non-regulatory, self-regulatory and co-regulatory solutions to a policy problem.*

**The difference between outcomes and outputs.**

Where possible, state the objective in terms of outcomes. If outcomes cannot be directly measured, use outputs. Outputs are the results of activities that can be clearly stated or measured and relate to the desired outcomes. Ideally, outcomes and outputs should be SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound.

*For example, a policy objective could be to protect the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). This is an outcome. An output could be improving water quality by a certain amount over a specific time period.*

**There can be several objectives.** There may be several policy goals, each with a variety of outcomes. If there are several policy objectives, include a statement about the relative importance of each objective.

*For example, there could be a primary objective of protecting the GBR and a secondary objective of improving land and water resource use.*

**If there are constraints on the objectives, identify them.** *For instance, if the objective must be achieved within a certain timeframe, clearly state the constraint in the definition of the objective.*