

Section 5(e) of the *Environmental Management Act* provides the Minister authority to prepare and publish “policies, strategies, objectives, guidelines and standards for the protection and management of the environment”. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (ENV) develops water quality objectives (WQOs) to guide the balance between human activities and healthy waterbodies.

### What are WQOs?

WQOs are numbers or statements representing low-risk conditions for a specific waterbody to ensure protection of water values. WQOs are developed for parameters of potential concern and can include chemical, physical and biological characteristics.

### What do WQOs aim to protect?

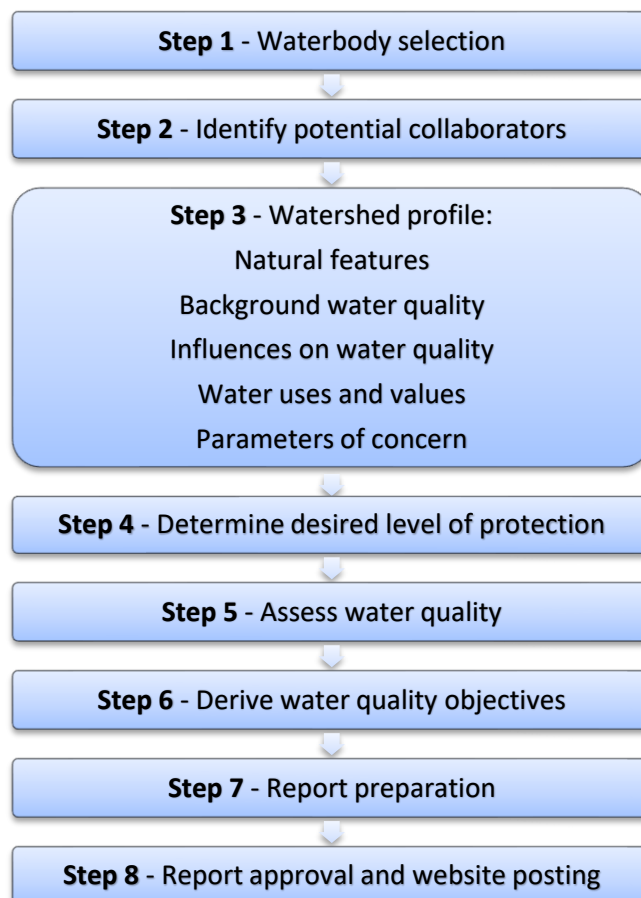
WQOs are developed for the protection of important values and uses related to a waterbody. These include:

- Drinking water sources;
- Aquatic life and its habitat;
- Wildlife and its habitat;
- Agriculture (livestock watering and irrigation);
- Recreational use and aesthetics; and
- Traditional, cultural, and social values.

### How are WQOs developed?

WQOs are established on a priority basis for freshwater, estuarine and marine waterbodies of regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and international significance. Objectives are informed by a site-specific water quality assessment using B.C.-approved water quality guidelines or similar information, the values identified for the waterbody, the desired level of protection, and local and Indigenous knowledge. WQOs may be developed in collaboration with other levels of government, including First Nations, where appropriate.

WQO development follows this process:



### How are WQOs used?

WQOs constitute official ENV policy and must be considered in ENV statutory decisions potentially affecting water quality. WQOs can also guide other processes such as the establishment of water objectives under the *Water Sustainability Act*. WQOs provide benchmarks for baseline characterizations and environmental impact assessments. WQOs are not legally enforceable but may provide the basis for waste discharge authorizations limits which are enforceable. WQOs formalize water quality goals for important waterbodies in B.C., promote water sustainability and stewardship, and inform resource management decisions.

**How do we know if WQOs are being met?**

WQO policy reports include a recommended monitoring program designed to determine the level of attainment.

**Resources**

B.C. Water Quality Objectives -

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/water-quality/water-quality-objectives>