Executive Summary Reporting 101

There are three main components involved in creating an effective Executive Summary document for Condition assessments.

1. Subject understanding
2. Decision making
3. Expressive writing

Reports on condition assessments come in many styles and outlooks – they can be of a structural, safety, security or water quality perspective and often go into technical (and necessary) detail. While these are an important part of any inspection program, there is one report that is often misunderstood and poorly prepared - the Executive Summary.

This report should be brief, technically correct and be able to convey the 'essence' of the issue or issues being discussed. It is NOT a 'cut and paste' of the main reports, but rather a fresh perspective of the main issues identified. It is intended to be read and understood by supervisors and management who are usually 'time short', but who also need to be aware of the inspection outcomes.

Subject understanding: An effective summary needs to be prepared by the person with the most technical knowledge of the subject being inspected. Accurate photography is an essential part of the process, as it allows impressions made out in the field to be checked and re-assessed at a later date. It also facilitates advice from personnel not onsite at the time, but who have the ability to offer opinions based on what they are seeing from the imagery.

Decision making: It is easy to write lots of words and take multiple images of the one issue, but having the ability to decide which sentence or image 'best defines' the issue is a skill that has to be learned and practised. It is a time of reflection, to decide how best to present the inspection findings to others who have not been present at the time, but who are responsible for implementing the outcomes required.

Expressive writing: Words can have different meanings to different people, so it is important to choose carefully and assess the descriptors of the inspection findings for both technical and 'emotional' expressions. The difference between 'resolve' and 'eliminate' is a good example – *resolve* implies finding a worthwhile solution, while *eliminate* can often mean a harsh and final outcome to a problem. If there are multiple defects found in a common issue, then they can be described as 'typical' ie. The coating defect noted in image No6 is typical of the multiple problems identified.

So learn to keep it short, technically correct and informative to the reader. Anything more and it is NOT an Executive Summary!