



4 March 2004

TO: Stormwater Task Force
FROM: Tim Moore
RE: Explanation of Accelerated Delphi Approach

Background

DELPHI was originally developed by the Department of Defense as a forecasting tool for wargame scenarios. Because it was uncannily accurate in predicting subjective phenomenon, it has since been modified for use as a consensus-building tool. Experience across many government and corporate applications, including the Nitrogen-TDS Task Force in the Santa Ana River watershed, shows that it works very well.

We recommend this approach in order to assure that the process for developing methods and definitions is objective and rigorous. There must be general agreement with, and commitment to, the recommendations in order to avoid serious legal disputes later in the regulatory revision cycle.

We believe a “structured” consensus-building strategy is necessary because previous efforts (JMM TIN/TDS Study & the SAR-UAA) show that ad hoc approaches increase cost, delay, hostility, and uncertainty. DELPHI was selected because it is a well-defined and well-proven technique which would minimize any future claim that the decision process was biased.

We propose to do two separate DELPHI series: one for beneficial use designations and one for establishing impairment appropriate water quality criteria. Both would share the same basic structure, but would be conducted in two distinct phases. In addition, the process has been modified from that used during the Nitrogen-TDS Task Force to accelerate the discussions and decisionmaking.

Here is how we would apply the DELPHI structure to the issues facing the Stormwater Task Force:

STEP 1: SUMMARY OF ISSUES

We would begin by preparing and submitting a "Focus Document" to the Task Force. The document would posit several key questions that the Task Force must seek to answer. It will also include a "strawman" proposal for Task Force consideration. Task Force participants will receive the Focus Document approximately 3-4 weeks before the next scheduled meeting.

DELPHI emphasizes a "visual approach" to argument. By forcing arguments into matrix cells, it becomes immediately apparent when there are or aren't opposing arguments in the adjacent cell. DELPHI imposes structure on the deliberation process.

STEP 2: INITIAL POSITION MEMOS

Each Task Force participant must prepare a written response to the questions posed and strawman proposal in the Focus Document. Each participant would also be encouraged to identify any other critical concerns of their agency/group as well as to propose strawman alternatives of their own. Participants will be asked to share all evidence which supports their positions and provide appropriate reference citations.

DELPHI procedure encourages initial positions and reactions to be made anonymously. The written responses are submitted without attribution and are never deemed to be an official agency position. This encourages more open and frank discussion. In addition, the requirement that everything be written tends to make responses much clearer, briefer, and better supported. The whole process minimizes ego-attacks and encourages freer dialogue. It also makes more efficient use of meeting time because initial positions are already well-defined.

STEP 3: SUMMARY MATRIX

The consultant will read each written response and summarize the various arguments and alternative proposals into a tabular matrix. The matrix will be copied and sent to all Task Force participants approximately 10 days before the next scheduled meeting. Email and the internet will be used to speed Task Force communications.

Where appropriate, supporting documentation and reference citations will be appended to the Summary Matrix. Whenever possible, such documentation will be scanned and made available for electronic download from SAWPA's website.

Task Force participants are encouraged to review the arguments and prepare written responses where appropriate. These, too, will be submitted to SAWPA and the consultant/facilitator no more than 5 days after receipt.

STEP 5: CONSENSUS MEETINGS

Participants come together to continue the dialogue. Consultant will summarize the argument matrix emphasizing areas of agreement and disagreement. The meetings themselves take the form of an intense Socratic dialogue with strong emphasis on supporting various claims with credible evidence.

Unlike traditional moderated discussion groups, the role of the consultant-facilitator is to act as a surrogate advocate for all of the positions held by Task Force members. In addition, the consultant-facilitator serves as a devil's advocate to challenge all positions held by Task Force members.

Because the Task Force meetings are an integral part of the Basin Planning update process, silence by participants has meaning. The purpose of the Task Force is to identify and debate the issues in a forum where there is more time and expertise than is generally available in Regional Board workshops and hearings.

Because DELPHI is a consensus-building tool, no attempt is made to “foist” a final recommendation on the group without general agreement. There is no vote-taking based on majority-rule. DELPHI is intended to identify the areas of agreement and the areas of disagreement. Even a little agreement, can make the Task Force process significantly more cost-efficient. And, the areas of disagreements serve identify the areas where more rigorous analysis is necessary.

When the progress reports are written; the areas of agreement and disagreement will be noted. When appropriate, additional rounds of anonymous written responses can be initiated.

When the Task Force is able to reach consensus, the agreement is documented in writing and resubmitted for final consideration and approval. Where consensus cannot be reached, opposing positions with the relevant supporting evidence are summarized in writing and presented to the Regional Water Quality Control Board at the next regularly scheduled progress workshop. The purpose of the presentation is to get a sense of the Board's thinking on the subject, not to seek an up or down vote from the Board members.

Often, stubborn issues are set aside to consider other concerns for a while. Near the end of each project phase, the tough issues are brought back to the Task Force for further consideration. If consensus cannot be reached, the viability and utility of subsequent project phases may or may not be affected depending on the specific issue in dispute. Identifying impasses early in the process is one of the key benefits to using the DELPHI technique. It prevents the needless expenditure of resources when the likelihood of success is small.