

## CRAB DREDGE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Monday July 23, 2012  
5:00 pm – VMRC 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Library

### Attendees:

#### Committee Members

Ken Diggs  
Ty Farrington  
Bill Mullis  
Clyde Pruitt  
Eugene Pruitt

#### VMRC Staff

Rob O'Reilly  
Joe Grist  
Allison Watts

#### Additional Attendees

Hon. Joe Palmer (VMRC – Commissioner)  
Danielle McCulloch (VIMS)  
Mike Seebo (VIMS)  
Rom Lipcius (VIMS)  
Kim Huskey (Virginia Seafood Council)  
Jenn Aiosa (Environmental Defense Fund)  
Matt Mullin (Environmental Defense Fund)

### I. Dredge captain selection and vessel requirement updates

Mr. Mike Seebo (VIMS) explained that VIMS staff members are working through the dredge captain selection process. Thirteen total captains have been identified through submitted nominations, and six vessels will be ultimately chosen (four for the experiment and two alternates). Mr. Seebo will be visiting vessels for preliminary inspections to determine if vessels qualify for the experiment, and the participating vessels will have to pass a USCG commercial fishing vessel exam. Dr. Rom Lipcius (VIMS) explained that they are considering dredge captains who were recommended and have prior experience working with researchers, in order to keep the selection process both fair and scientifically sound.

### II. Study design and observer coverage

Dr. Lipcius informed the subcommittee that the draft study design has been redesigned to better mimic the actual dredge fishery. The variables to be addressed will include the speed of vessels while dredging, the water temperature, and the substrate type (mud versus sand). Other effects to be measured as independent variables will include the initial density of crabs in the study areas, and the presence of vegetation and oyster shells. At each study site, an experimental and control area will be dredged. Standardized dredge tows will be performed in each area before and after the actual

experiment to estimate crab densities and to calculate morality. Actual area size of the experimental and control blocks will be determined through consultation with the selected dredge captains. The sites must be small enough to adequately measure crab density but large enough to allow for normal dredging activities.

Concern was raised by subcommittee members about on-board observer safety, and the possibility of participatory VMRC Law Enforcement vessels was discussed. All four dredge vessels will be dredging the same study sites each day, to improve safety and to simplify the on-board observer coverage process. Only two of the four vessels will have actual observers on board on any given day. A project safety committee will be formed to provide guidance on whether to perform the research work on days when weather and sea conditions may be unfavorable. A lead observer (scientist) will be designated for each day from the observer crew to make any immediate project decisions as they occur before or during operations.

### III. Mandatory harvest reporting requirements

Crabs harvested will be reported by the individual captains through the VMRC Mandatory Harvest Reporting system. Crabs will count towards the annual exploitation rate calculation, and this experiment will aid in estimating incidental mortality of the dredge fishery (which is the ultimate goal for all crab fishery gears).

### IV. Start-up costs, other expenses, and bushel payment criteria

VMRC will reimburse start-up costs for the participating dredgers through an itemized voucher process. Bushel payments will reimburse dredgers who do not harvest the full 40 bushel daily limit.

Final comments:

The final draft design will be sent out for subcommittee approval.