



MEMORANDUM

TO: Pat Geer, Chief of Fisheries Management
Virginia Marine Resources Commission

FROM: Rom Lipcius, Professor of Marine Science

RE: Blue Crab Winter Dredge Fishery

DATE: 20 September 2024

Herein I am providing the VIMS opinion on the potential reopening of the blue crab winter dredge fishery (subsequently “dredge fishery”). VIMS supports reopening of the dredge fishery, but only if the following requirements are met. Otherwise, VIMS does not support reopening of the dredge fishery.

Requirements for reopening the dredge fishery are the following:

1. The dredge fishery must operate only in mud or muddy bottom, which is indicated by the polygon in Figure 1, where blue crab and horseshoe crab bycatch mortality are expected to be low.
2. Compensation in terms of blue crab catch estimated for the dredge fishery is required, and is to be accomplished by reducing catch in the pot fishery during March through May of the season immediately following the dredge fishery.

Figure 1. A. Abundance of 1+ females in winter dredge survey from 2020-2024. B and D. Sediment type derived from sediment samples taken during winter dredge survey. C. Abundance of 1+ females in winter dredge survey from 2009-2013. Female abundance is highest in sand 61-80% and in muddy sand (41-60% sand). The fishery should operate in mud (0-20% sand) and sandy mud (21-40% sand). Note the northward shift in female abundance during 2020-2024 compared with 2009-2013.

