

THE EFFECTS OF DREDGE FISHING ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

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Abstract

Fishing activity does not only impact on the fish stocks themselves, but also the ecosystem within which the fish live in. This paper presents an overview of knowledge on the effects of dredging activities on marine habitats. Dredging is used for harvesting bivalve mollusks such as oysters, clams and scallops from the seabed. The primary negative impact resulting from dredge fishing is a reduction in an abundance and diversity of seabed flora and fauna. Dredging operations inadvertently catch a range of unwanted species that are discarded into the sea. Identified dredging effects can include entrainment of organisms, increased turbidity at the dredging site, fish injury associated with exposure to suspended sediments and decreased dissolved oxygen, and fish behavioral effects due to the effects of noise. They reduce their abundance, spawning potential and, possibly, population parameters (growth, maturation, etc.). The impact on the habitat depends on the gear and sediment type. Highly dynamic, soft bottoms may suffer limited damage even when exploited by heavy (including hydraulic) dredges. On the contrary, stable, hard, and highly structured habitats will be easily damaged.

Key words: fishing activity, marine habitats, dredging