

**BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS OF
PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE RULES OF THE
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

**CHAPTER 391-2
COASTAL RESOURCES**

**SUBJECT 391-2-4
SALTWATER FISHING REGULATIONS**

Background:

Through the early 1900's, Georgia had a prosperous and lucrative oyster industry. Today, Georgia's oyster harvest represents a fraction of former yields although wild oyster harvest continues to be a very sustainable fishery. New techniques for oyster mariculture, or farming, in subtidal waters of creeks and rivers have recently been deployed in Georgia, demonstrating the potential for substantial economic growth in the industry.

The effort to support new oyster mariculture opportunities began with legislative policy reform in 2019 when House Bill 501 amended O.C.G.A Title 27, Chapter 4 to provide the foundation for shellfish mariculture in balance with the environment and other public uses of coastal waters and authorized the Board of Natural Resources to promulgate rules necessary to support the oyster industry.

In 2020, the Board adopted rules for oyster mariculture that incorporated the National Shellfish Sanitation Program's "Model Ordinance" (NSSP MO) by reference and established minimum seed sizes and criteria for shellfish seed importation and siting of subtidal leases (Rule 391-2-4-.18). Subsequently, the Department produced a new Shellfish Policy Manual and an online leasing dashboard that outlines all its requirements and expectations for commercial shellfish operations.

In April 2025, the Board adopted Rule **391-2-4-.19 Commercial Shellfish; Requirements for Vibrio Control**, establishing Departmental procedures to enable Certified Shellfish Master Harvesters to harvest during an otherwise closed season. Harvest during closed season, June through September, would use strict two (2) hour time/temperature controls for the control of *Vibrio* bacteria as outlined in the Department's annual *Vibrio* Control Plan. Naturally occurring throughout estuarine waters, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (*Vp*) and *Vibrio vulnificus* (*Vv*) are bacteria that can cause moderate to severe gastrointestinal illness or death in those with compromised immune systems. These concerns are minimized by thoroughly cooking the shellfish; however,