



Commercial Saltwater Fishing Regulations



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This brochure is intended as a pocket guide to the laws and regulations that govern the major commercial saltwater fishing activities along the Georgia coast. For exact wording of the fishing laws and regulations, see the *Official Code of Georgia Annotated* (O.C.G.A.) and the current copy of the *Department of Natural Resources Regulations*.

The Georgia Secretary of State's office provides free and open access to all Georgia laws and regulations through the service company *LexisNexis*. The links are:

- O.C.G.A.: [http:// www.lexisnexus.com](http://www.lexisnexus.com)
- GA DNR Board Rules: <http://rules.sos.ga.gov/gac/391>

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bycatch Reduction Device: BRD
- Coastal Resources Division: CRD
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources: Department, DNR
- National Marine Fisheries Service: NMFS
- Official Code of Georgia Annotated: O.C.G.A.
- Rules of the Georgia Board of Natural Resources: Rule
- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council: SAFMC
- Turtle Excluder Device: TED

DEFINITIONS

- Commercial fishing: The sale or offering for sale of fish by a person taking such fish, or one who is fishing with commercial fishing gear.
- Commercial quantities: An amount equal to one bushel or more.
- Daily creel limit. The lawful amount of a species of finfish or other seafood that a person may take in one day.
- Minimum size: The smallest allowable size of finfish or other seafood that can be kept.
- Night: From 30 minutes after official sunset up to 30 minutes before official sunrise.
- Open season: The specified period of time during which one may take certain finfish species or other seafood.

- Seafood: The marine and estuarine fauna/flora used as food (or is suitable for food) and specifically includes, but is not limited to, shrimp taken for bait and horseshoe crabs taken for bait.
- Wanton waste: The willful or deliberate taking and killing of any food or baitfish, and the subsequent voluntary discard, waste or abandonment of such food or baitfish. One should sort or cull his/her catch on the water and return any undersized or unwanted wildlife to the water ALIVE. When one throws away wildlife, he/she is not only wasting valuable resources, but also breaking the law. Persons caught dumping wildlife or parts thereof will be charged with littering (O.C.G.A. 16-7-43).

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Fishermen who take seafood for commercial sale must possess a valid commercial fishing license with the appropriate species endorsements. If a boat is used, a commercial boat license is required and should be in possession of the person(s) who is/are fishing (O.C.G.A. 27-4-110).

When fishing in state waters, commercial fishermen must abide by season, creel, and size limits when harvesting any seafood for which the Georgia General Assembly or the Board of Natural Resources (Board) has created regulations. However, individuals fishing with a valid federal commercial fishing permit in federal waters may exceed the creel limits, provided that: (1) those waters are open for commercial fishing; (2) individuals have the specified gear; (3) minimum size limits are observed; (4) the quota has not been met; and (5) the Board has not prohibited sale of the species.

Finfish (for which there are minimum sizes) and/or creel must be landed head and fins intact with the exception of sharks. Sharks may be headed, but fins must remain naturally attached. Transfer at sea is prohibited (Board Rule 391-2-4-.04).

COMMERCIAL LICENSES

O.C.G.A. 27-2-23

All commercial licenses are valid from April 1 to March 31 of the following year. Commercial licenses may be purchased in person at the Brunswick office or by mail. The license office is located at One Conservation Way, Brunswick, GA 31520; Phone: (912) 264-7237. Sales hours are Monday –

Friday 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. License application packets can be downloaded at www.CoastalGadnr.org/CommercialFishing. **It is unlawful for a seafood dealer to purchase seafood from any person other than a properly licensed seafood harvester or another seafood dealer** (O.C.G.A. 27-2-136).

Commercial Fishing License

Each person engaged in commercial fishing within Georgia waters AND/OR a harvester unloading marine seafood products caught in other jurisdictions is required to have this license unless covered by a Trawler Crew License. A commercial fishing license costs a resident \$20.00 and a nonresident \$200.00. This license is separate and distinct from the commercial fishing boat license, crab license and cast net license (O.C.G.A. 27-4-110).

Commercial Fishing Species Endorsements

A species endorsement is required for each species fished at a cost of \$5 per endorsement for residents and \$10 for non-residents. Species requiring endorsements are bait minnows, bait shrimp, cannonball jellyfish, catfish in saltwater, crab, eel, finfish (not including shad, bait minnows, or catfish in saltwater), food shrimp, horseshoe crab, shad, shellfish, and whelk.

Trawler Crew License

The owner or operator of a properly licensed trawler may purchase a trawler crew license covering all crew members aboard the trawler while fishing. All such crew members shall be exempt from the personal commercial fishing license requirements while on-board the vessel. The trawler crew license shall be separate and distinct from any other license, shall be valid only for the trawler for which it is purchased, and shall not be transferable to any other trawler or vessel. Such trawler crew license is valid for a fishing year as provided for in (O.C.G.A. 27-2-3) and shall be carried onboard the trawler while the trawler is in operation. The cost of the trawler crew license is \$200 per year for resident vessels and \$600 per year for non-resident vessels.

Trawler License

In order to obtain a commercial trawler license, which is required for fishing with power-drawn nets, the owner of the boat must do the following: File with the DNR a \$5,000 forfeiture bond obtained from a bonding surety or insurance company licensed to do business in Georgia; or, provided the boat is not a documented vessel, file with DNR a signed affidavit stating that

he/she is the sole owner of the boat and that the boat is owned free and clear from all encumbrances such as liens, mortgages, and other evidence of a security interest. One must acknowledge that the boat will be subject to confiscation and seizure, as provided in (O.C.G.A. 27-4-137), when used in violation of that section of the law (O.C.G.A. 27-4-134). The cost of a trawler license for a Georgia resident is \$85 for the first 18 feet of vessel length, plus \$3 per foot for each additional foot or fraction thereof over 18 feet. The cost of this license to a nonresident is \$150 over the cost to a resident (O.C.G.A. 27-2-8).

Non-Trawler License

If a boat is used for commercial purposes other than trawling for shrimp in salt water, a commercial fishing boat license (non-trawler) is required. The non-trawler license fee is \$5.00. The cost of this license for a nonresident is \$50 over the cost to the resident. (O.C.G.A. 27-2-8)

Seafood Dealer License ***O.C.G.A. 27-4-136***

A Seafood Dealer License is required for any person to operate as a seafood dealer or to own or operate shellfish canning or shucking facilities or otherwise deal in purchasing, landing, packing, or supplying raw shrimp, shellfish, crabs, fish, or other seafood for commercial purposes. This license is separate and distinct from seafood dealer licenses issued by other agencies.

Seafood dealers must keep a written record of the following: (1) the amount of shrimp, shellfish, crabs, fish, or other seafood taken from Georgia waters for commercial purposes; (2) the name of each person from whom he/she purchased seafood; (3) the date and price of the purchase; (4) the grade and quantity purchased; (5) the name, number, and approximate tonnage of the boat in which they were brought to the facility; (6) the number of calendar days expended in harvesting the product; (7) the approximate location or locations of harvest; (8) the quantity canned and packed for shipment; (9) the date and amount of each shipment; and (10) such other information as DNR requires. Reports must be sent to the CRD headquarters at One Conservation Way, Brunswick, GA 31520.

Saltwater Fishing Guide License
O.C.G.A 27-2-23.2

Anyone wishing to operate as a saltwater fishing guide in the state of Georgia must first purchase a Saltwater Fishing Guide License. A saltwater fishing guide is a person engaged in the occupation of taking fee-paying anglers fishing in the salt waters of this state. The fee for this license is \$25 for residents and \$50 for non-residents.

In addition, a licensed saltwater fishing guide who also possesses a valid United States Coast Guard passenger vessel operator license may opt to purchase an annual customer fishing license, which covers all fee-paying anglers fishing with them (i.e. the paying customer will not need a personal recreational fishing license). For a resident saltwater fishing guide carrying six or fewer passengers, the cost of this license is \$150. For non-resident saltwater fishing guides, the cost is \$400. For resident saltwater fishing guides carrying more than six passengers the cost of the license is \$400 and for non-resident saltwater fishing guides, the cost is \$400. If fishing without paying customers, a recreational fishing license must be purchased as the guide license is separate and distinct from other licenses.

License Fee Quick Reference		
License Type	Resident	Non- Resident
Commercial Fishing License	\$20	\$200
Crabbing	\$20	\$200
Crab Pots (per pot)	\$2.50	\$2.50
Cast Net Shrimp	\$250	\$2,500
Trawl Vessel Crew	\$200	\$600
Species Endorsements	\$5	\$10
Bait Dealer	\$40	\$250
Soft-Shell Crab Dealer	\$40	n/a
Seafood Dealer	\$40	n/a
Trawl Vessel	\$85 + \$3/ft over 18ft	\$150
Non-Trawl Vessel	\$5	\$50
Saltwater Fishing Guide	\$25	\$50
Customer License up to 6	\$150	\$400
Customer License 7+	\$400	\$400
Pier License	\$400	n/a

MANDATORY RECORDS AND REPORTING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-118, 27-4-136, 27-4-150; Board Rule 391-2-4-.09

Any person harvesting seafood products and/or acting as a seafood dealer purchasing seafood from a harvester is required to submit landing information on approved forms to DNR. The forms must be filled out in their entirety at the time a transaction takes place between a harvester and seafood dealer. These forms must be submitted to DNR by the 10th of each month. Any questions concerning commercial fishing records should be directed to CRD's Cooperative Statistics Project in Brunswick at (912) 264-7218. Additional forms and return envelopes are available upon request. All shellfish master collecting permittees must maintain records in a form as prescribed by the Department of Agriculture.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICES

Acworth	(770)-529-2424	Thomson	(706) 595-4211
Albany	(912) 430-4252	Gainesville	(770) 535-5499
Brunswick	(912) 264-7237	Metter	(912) 685-2145

DNR monitors a toll-free number 24/7 to receive calls reporting pollution, fish kills, poaching, illegal shrimping, or any other violations of Georgia's Game and Fish laws and regulations. To report a violation, call the DNR RANGER HOTLINE at 1-800-241-4113.

SALTWATER DELINEATIONS

Demarcation Line

O.C.G.A. 27-4-1

The line established as Georgia's official separation point between salt and freshwater for purposes of commercial and sport fishing activities is as follows:

The point at which U. S. 17 crosses the following bodies of water and their tributaries: St. Marys River, Satilla River, South Altamaha River, Champney River, Butler River, Darien River, Little Ogeechee System (except Salt Creek), North Newport River, Medway River, Big Ogeechee River, and the point at which Georgia Highway 25/South Carolina 170 crosses the

Savannah River and its tributaries. All water seaward of these points is considered salt water.

The following streams and their tributaries are designated as salt water for their entire length: Crooked River, Little Satilla River, South Brunswick River, Turtle River, Sapelo River, South Newport River, Salt Creek (Little Ogeechee System), and all other rivers, streams, and tributaries in the six coastal counties which are not enumerated above (Chatham, Bryan, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn, and Camden).

NOTE: Fresh water ponds on the seaward side of the official demarcation line are not considered salt waters. Boundary lines demarcating legal waters specific for shrimping, crabbing, commercial eel fishing and commercial catfishing vary from the saltwater demarcation line. Legal waters for these activities are discussed in the respective sections.

Sound/Beach Boundaries ***Board Rule 391-2-4-.03***

Sound/Beach boundaries consist of imaginary lines running through coordinates generally located on the southern tip of a barrier island to the northern tip of the next barrier island immediately south. Specifically, these are:

Savannah River. The portion of the "Savannah River" navigational channel between the north and south jetties and eastward of the buoy, R"24", FL R 4 sec., at the landward end of the jetties, southeast of Oyster Bed Island (by Administrative Order).

Estelle Sound (Savannah River). The boundary is from the point located at 32° 02' 04.5" N / 80° 51' 03.8" W at the easternmost end of the south jetty of the Savannah River Entrance to the point located at 32° 01' 48" N / 80° 51' 09" W at the northern tip of Tybee Island.

Estelle Beach (Savannah River). South of a line extending along the south jetty of the Savannah River Entrance to the lighted day beacon at the easternmost tip of the south jetty, and west of a line extending from said lighted day beacon south to the northernmost tip of Tybee Island (by Administrative Order).

Wassaw Sound. The boundary is from the point located at 31° 56' 38" N / 80° 55' 45" W on the southern tip of Little Tybee Island to the point

located at $31^{\circ} 54' 37.5''$ N/ $80^{\circ} 56' 09.5''$ W, directly in front of the large concrete bunker on the northern tip of Wassaw Island.

Ossabaw Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 51' 27''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 00' 00''$ W on the southern tip of Wassaw Island to the point located at $31^{\circ} 49' 02''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 02' 17''$ W on the northern tip of Ossabaw Island.

St. Catherines Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 43' 17''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 8' 13''$ W on the southern tip of Ossabaw Island to the point located at $31^{\circ} 41' 55''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 8' 23''$ W on the northern tip of St. Catherines Island.

Sapelo Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 33' 20''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 10' 35''$ W on the southern tip of St. Catherines Island to the point located $31^{\circ} 31' 50''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 11' 13''$ W on the northern tip of Black Beard Island.

Doboy Sound and Altamaha Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 22' 55''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 16' 25''$ W on the southern tip of Sapelo Island to the point located at $31^{\circ} 21' 50.48''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 17' 36.63''$ W on the northern tip of Wolf Island then turning south to a point located at $31^{\circ} 19' 34.12''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 17' 18.20''$ W on the southern tip of Wolf Island, finally turning southwest to a point located at $31^{\circ} 17' 21''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 17' 57''$ near the northeastern tip of Little St. Simons Island.

Hampton River. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 13' 5''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 18' 7''$ W on the southern tip of Little St. Simons Island to the point located at $31^{\circ} 12' 48''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 18' 38''$ W on the northeastern tip of Sea Island.

St. Simons Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 08' 01''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 23' 37''$ W at the base of the lighthouse on the southern tip of St. Simons Island to the point located at $31^{\circ} 7' 12''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 24' 35''$ W on the northern tip of Jekyll Island.

St. Andrew Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $31^{\circ} 0' 55''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 25' 48''$ W on the southern tip of Jekyll Island to the point located at $30^{\circ} 58' 38''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 24' 49''$ W on the northern tip of Little Cumberland Island.

Cumberland Sound. The boundary is from the point located at $30^{\circ} 42' 52''$ N/ $81^{\circ} 27' 10''$ W on the southern tip of Cumberland Island to the

point located at 30° 42' 21" N/ 81° 27' 15" W at the northern most point of Fort Clinch.

All ocean facing inlets and creeks on the eastern side of barrier islands such as, but not limited to, Tybee and Little Tybee Creek, McQueen's Inlet on St. Catherine's Island, Cabretta Inlet/Blackbeard Creek on Sapelo Island, Beacon Creek on Wolf Island, Gould's Inlet on St. Simons Island, and Christmas Creek on Cumberland Island, shall be considered sounds for the purposes of delineating sound/beach boundaries.

Exclusive Economic Zone Jurisdictional Boundary Lines

For the purposes of fisheries management, boundaries have been established that delineate the federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) beyond and adjacent to each state's territorial sea. Georgia's territorial sea extends to three nautical miles from shore. These jurisdictional lines enable the SAFMC and NMFS to recognize and enact measures that may be needed to complement state regulation and/or enhance enforcement. In federal waters off Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida, these boundaries are generally defined as follows:

Georgia - Florida EEZ Jurisdictional Line

A line running 90° True from St. Marys Entrance Channel Buoy R"10" along the 30° 42' 45.6" North Latitude line to the eastward boundary of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nm); and

Georgia - South Carolina EEZ Jurisdictional Line

A line running 104° True from Savannah Entrance Channel Buoy R"6" (31° 59' 16.7" N Latitude, 080° 46' 02.5" W Longitude) to the eastward boundary of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nm). For specific information regarding these federal EEZ jurisdictional lines, contact NMFS at (888) 872-8862.

Special Management Zones

The SAFMC has designated Georgia's artificial reefs sited in federal waters beyond 3 nm as Special Management Zones (SMZs). Under this designation, fishing gear at these reefs is restricted to handline, rod & reel, and spearfishing gear, including powerheads. Harvest utilizing powerheads at the SMZs is limited to the recreational bag limits.

Georgia “Beach” Reefs

Two of Georgia's 31 offshore artificial reefs are located within the state's 3 nm territorial sea. Each of these permitted "beach" reef sites covers an area 400-yard diameter. Water depth clearances over the materials at the "beach" reefs are 10'-12' at Mean Low Water (MLW). Locations of these reefs are as follows:

Artificial Reef BL. Located approximately 3 nm east of St. Catherines Island, coordinates for the center are 31° 38.521' N Latitude, 081° 04.792' W Longitude.

Artificial Reef BH. Located approximately 2.5 nm east of Blackbeard Island, coordinates for the center are 31° 30.391' N Latitude, 081° 06.260' W Longitude.

For further information on Georgia's artificial reef program, contact CRD at (912) 264-7218.

FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Federal regulations for commercial fisheries are in effect for many finfish and crustaceans found in federal waters beyond Georgia's three-mile territorial sea. Notable examples of federally regulated species currently include, but are not limited to, Mackerel, Cobia, Red Porgy, Snapper, Grouper, and other Reef fish, Shark, Shrimp and Spiny Lobster. Commercially, these regulations include permitting requirements for both commercial and charter fishing, gear restrictions, size limits, quotas, trip limits, closures, landing, and reporting requirements, and more.

For complete, updated information on federal regulations or permits, size and bag limits, and seasons, commercial fishermen should contact the SAFMC at (843) 571-4366, <http://www.safmc.net> or call NMFS at (888) 872-8862 permits, <http://www.nmfspermits.com>.

GRAY’S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Located approximately 18 nm east of Sapelo Island, Gray's Reef was designated a National Marine Sanctuary in 1981. Administered by NOAA, certain activities are prohibited in the Sanctuary to protect the unique marine resources found in this 4x4 nm natural reef area. For information on

these regulations and Gray's Reef, call (912) 598-2345 or write to the Sanctuary Manager, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, 10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, Georgia, 31411. To report violations of federal regulations, call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline (1-800-853-1964).

BOATING SAFETY ZONES

O.C.G.A. 52-7-13

Boating safety zones have been established off the public beaches on Jekyll Island, Tybee Island, St. Simons Island, and Sea Island. These zones consist of waters from the northernmost point to the southernmost point of each of these islands from the high-water mark to a distance 1,000 feet seaward. From May 1st through September 30th power boats, jet skis, and other motorized craft are prohibited in these zones.

BOATING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

O.C.G.A. 52-7-12

People who are arrested for boating under the influence (BUI) in Georgia may lose boat operation privileges for up to a year for a first-time conviction, three years for a second conviction, and five years for a third conviction. In addition, they will be charged with a misdemeanor that is punishable with up to \$1,000 fine and/or up to 12 months in prison.

There is a "zero tolerance" level of .02 for people under age 21 who are caught operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Minors who are arrested for BUI face misdemeanor charges punishable with up to \$1,000 fine and/or up to 12 months in prison. The law designates misdemeanor offenses for "endangering a child" if a boat operator transports a child under the age of 14 while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The law allows for the revocation of boating privileges of up to a year for people who refuse a sobriety test when suspected of operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and for people whose blood, breath or urine test shows the presence of illegal drugs or an alcohol level of .08 or higher. For more information on boating laws or other boating safety issues, contact the nearest DNR Law Enforcement Office, Brunswick (912) 264-7237.

FOOD SHRIMP TRAWLING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-133

Licenses

Each person engaged in commercial food shrimp harvesting is required to have a commercial fishing license, unless covered under a “vessel crew license.” A commercial trawler boat license is also needed before fishing with power drawn nets in Georgia waters. Each commercial food shrimp trawler must also display an identification board. For harvesters selling directly to the public, a seafood dealer license is required as is the reporting of landings.

Areas and Seasons

The offshore waters (seaward of the sounds to the three-mile territorial limit) are permanently closed by law to food shrimp trawling from March 1st through May 14th of each year. Based on sound biological, environmental, economic, and social criteria set forth in state law, the DNR Commissioner may open state offshore waters to commercial food shrimping with power drawn nets from May 15th through December 31st of each year, if shrimp counts are 45 or fewer per pound with heads on. During January and February, the Commissioner may open the offshore waters if the shrimp count is 50 or fewer per pound with heads on. The sounds are permanently closed January 1st through August 31st each year. Cumberland, St. Andrew, St. Simons, Sapelo, Ossabaw, and Wassaw sounds may be opened from September 1st through December 31st at the Commissioner's discretion. (See sound/beach boundaries).

Official notice of the opening or closing of waters is posted by CRD at county courthouses and on shrimp docks at least 24 hours prior to the opening or closing. In addition, newspapers, radio stations and other media are also asked to notify interested persons. Food shrimping with power-drawn nets is never permitted in tidal rivers or creeks.

Hours

Legal hours for the commercial harvest of shrimp begin 30 minutes before official sunrise and extend to 30 minutes after official sunset. Trawling at night is prohibited out to the three-mile limit regardless of whether or not the waters are open.

Size and Catch Limits.

There are no limits on the size, or number or pounds of shrimp that may be taken or possessed by a licensed commercial food shrimper using power drawn nets.

Gear

The maximum footrope length for a single trawl or trawls combined is 220 feet, not including the foot-rope length of a single trawl not greater than 16 feet when used as a try net. DNR is authorized to exempt trawls used by persons holding a valid DNR granted scientific collection permit.

Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)

Board Rule 391-2-4-.05; 50 CFR 223.205-207

Commercial food shrimp trawlers must have a qualified turtle excluder device (TED) in each net. A qualified TED is one that has been approved for use by the NMFS. There are several basic TED designs that have been approved by NMFS for use in Federal and state waters. A trynet having a headrope length of 20 feet or less is exempt from the TED requirement provided that such net is pulled immediately in front of another net and is not connected to another net in any way. Vessels using a single net having a headrope of 30 feet or less and perimeter around the leading edge of the net not greater than 82 feet is also exempt from the TED requirement.

Information on federal TED regulations can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/bycatch/turtle-excluder-device-regulations> or by contacting the Protected Species Management Branch, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, Saint Petersburg, Florida 33701. Phone: 727-824-5312.

Bycatch Reduction Device Requirement (BRDs)

Board Rule 391-2-4-.08

All food shrimp trawls with a headrope length greater than 16 feet, including try nets and hand-retrieved nets operating in Georgia and federal waters, must have a certified bycatch reduction device (BRD) installed in each net. All certified BRDs are to be used in conjunction with an approved Turtle Excluder Device in nets required to have a TED.

There are Four certified BRD models available for use in both federal and state waters including: (1) Fish Eye BRD, (2) Eight-Inch Expanded Mesh/Extended Funnel BRD, (3) Ten-Inch Expanded Mesh/Extended Funnel BRD, and (4) Diamond Fish Eye BRD. Contact DNR for information on installation specifications.

Additional BRD models may be included as they pass state and/or federal certification. Any BRD certified by NMFS is allowable in Georgia waters. BRDs currently certified for use in federal waters are also described in Amendment 2 to the SAFMC Shrimp Management Plan. Please contact CRD for information on how to have a BRD tested for certification. More information about BRDs can be found at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/bycatch/bycatch-reduction-devices-gulf-mexico-and-south-atlantic>.

Unloading at Bait Dealerships

O.C.G.A. 27-4-171; Board Rule 391-2-4-.14

The docking and unloading of food shrimp vessels are allowed at facilities having a bait dealer license. However, food shrimp may be off-loaded only. Food shrimp may not be processed, stored, or sold for retail on the premises of the bait dealership.

Identification Boards (for Trawlers)

An identification board has a background color of daylight fluorescent orange positioned on the bow or cabin of the boat. The numbers and letters will be assigned by DNR when the boat license is purchased and must be at least 16 inches in height x 2 inches in width, black in color, of block character, and spaced so as to be readable from the air (O.C.G.A. 27-4-133). Once a licensed boat is used for catching shrimp for bait, the boat may no longer be used to catch shrimp commercially for human consumption (Board Rule 391-2-4-.14).

FOOD SHRIMP CAST NETTING

O.C.G.A. 27-1-2, 27-4-132; Board Rule 391-2-4-.10, 391-2-4-.11

Licenses

The commercial food shrimp cast net fishery is regulated through a controlled access system. Only 200 licenses may be issued each year (O.C.G.A. 27-4-206). A commercial cast-netting license is required for any person wishing to sell cast net-caught shrimp. Cast net licenses must be renewed each year (May 31st deadline; Board Rule 391-2-4-.10), or the license will revert to DNR whereby it will be re-issued by lottery. To enter the lottery, an application must be filled out at the Brunswick license office between April 1 and June 1 each year. Applicants chosen to receive a license will be notified of their selection via certified mail. The license may not be transferred or sold. After August 1 of each year, DNR may offer for sale

available commercial food shrimp cast netting licenses on a first-come, first-served basis at the Coastal Regional Headquarters in Brunswick.

Areas, Seasons, and Times

The Commissioner is authorized to establish a food shrimp cast netting season between May 15th and the end of February (typically the same times that food shrimp trawling is open). During open season all saltwaters are open. Commercial fishing for shrimp is prohibited at night.

Gear

- Cast net: A cone shaped net designed to be thrown and retrieved by hand without mechanical assistance and designed to spread out and capture fish and shrimp as the weighted circumference sinks to the bottom and comes together when pulled by a line.
- Bait shrimp cast net: A cast net constructed of a minimum of three-eighths inch bar mesh.
- Food shrimp cast net: A cast net constructed of a minimum of five-eighths inch bar mesh.

There is no limit on the length or radius of any cast net. No person or group of persons fishing for food shrimp for commercial purposes shall have on board a vessel any cast net other than a food shrimp cast net.

Commercial Cast Net Catch Limits

From Season Opening through November 30, the maximum amount of shrimp allowable is 150 quarts of heads-on shrimp or 95 quarts of shrimp tails per day, no matter how many licensed commercial cast netters are on a boat. From December 1 through Season Close, the maximum amount of shrimp allowable is 75 quarts of heads-on shrimp or 48 quarts of shrimp tails per day no matter how many licensed commercial cast netters are on a boat. These limits apply even to shrimp taken with a combination of a cast net and seine.

Shrimping over Bait

It is against the law to place, deposit, distribute or scatter any bait of any kind in, on, or over any waters in order to lure, attract, or entice shrimp toward the bait or to cause shrimp to congregate in the area where bait is placed. It is also illegal to knowingly fish for shrimp in baited waters.

FOOD SHRIMP SEINING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-132; Board Rule 391-2-4-.12

Licenses

A commercial fishing license is required to use a seine for commercial purposes. If using a boat, a commercial non-trawler boat license is also required.

Catch Limits and Seasons

When food shrimping with a seine, no one person, whether alone or in a group, may possess more than 24 quarts of shrimp with heads on or 15 quarts of tails in any 24-hour period. If any person or group of persons occupying the same boat is in possession of a cast net and a seine, such person or persons shall be subject to the limits imposed for shrimp taken by cast net (see above).

The food shrimping season for seines is the same as the season for trawls and cast nets.

Gear

- Seines **12 feet in length or less**, with a maximum depth of 4 feet and maximum stretch mesh of 1 inch, may be used at any time in salt waters.
- Seines **less than 100 feet in length**, with a minimum stretched mesh size of one and one-fourth inches ($1\frac{1}{4}$ "), may be used on any sand beach on any barrier island of this state.
- Seines **from 100 feet to 300 feet**, with a minimum stretch mesh size of two and one-half inches ($2\frac{1}{2}$ "), may be used only on the oceanfront sides of beaches.
- Seines **over 300 ft** in length are prohibited.

The use of seines **over 12 feet in any inlet or tidal slough** is prohibited.

Other

A seine used in salt waters may not block more than one-half of the entrance of any tidal river, creek, slough, or inlet to the ocean. A seine may not be used as a gill net. A gill net is a net that is fished in a stationary manner to ensnare or entangle the fish in the meshes. Gill nets are prohibited in Georgia **salt waters**, except for commercial fishing for shad. Cast net shrimpers and seine shrimpers selling their catch to anyone other than a licensed seafood dealer is himself operating as a dealer and must purchase a Seafood Dealer License.

BAIT SHRIMPING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-171; Board Rule 391-2-4-.14

Licenses

A Bait Dealer's License and commercial fishing license are required before any person may sell shrimp for live or dead bait. However, a full-time employee of a licensed bait dealer, who possesses a commercial fishing license and a bait shrimp endorsement, may land bait shrimp for the dealer. An employee of a bait dealership may sell shrimp at that bait dealership without a commercial license but may not participate in the collection.

Restrictions

NO bait dealer or employee of a bait dealer can be issued both a bait dealer license AND a commercial food shrimp cast net license. A current bait dealer license becomes invalid when the holder obtains a commercial food shrimp cast net license.

Bond

An applicant for a bait dealer's license must file with DNR a \$2,000 forfeiture bond, obtained from a bonding, surety or insurance company licensed to do business in Georgia. The forfeiture bond is conditioned upon the faithful compliance by the bait dealer and all his or her employees with the laws and regulations relating to the taking, sale and possession of bait shrimp. Before DNR issues a bait dealer license, it will inspect the bait dealer facilities to determine compliance with the below-mentioned requirements. A trawler boat license is also required.

Sale of Bait Shrimp

Signage - A bait dealer must publicly advertise his facility by display of a sign on the facility drive and dock reading "Live Bait for Sale" and the hours and days of operation. Signs must be at least 24" X 18" with letters and numbers at least three inches in height. The dealer must also display any current business license required by the city or county and sales tax registration certificate.

Containers and Labeling. When sold, live bait shrimp must be in a container large enough to ensure that they are covered with at least one inch of saltwater. When sold as dead bait, the shrimp must be packed heads-on and frozen in packages that contain no more than one quart of shrimp. The packages must be clearly marked with letters at least one-half inch in size, to read as follows: "SOLD FOR BAIT ONLY".

Transaction Limits. No one person may buy more than eight (8) quarts of bait shrimp in any 24-hr. period, nor may any licensed bait dealership sell or otherwise distribute to one person, more than 8 quarts of bait shrimp in a 24-hr. period. The sale of bait shrimp in excess of this amount, but not exceeding 200 quarts, by one licensed bait dealer to another licensed bait dealer is allowed, provided DNR has been previously notified of the destination of the shrimp to be sold and the time and approximate amount of such sale, provided DNR has approved the equipment for transferring such shrimp.

Dealership Requirements. Bait dealers must keep all shrimp in saltwater tanks meeting the standards described below unless and until the shrimp die, in which case the shrimp must be promptly packaged and frozen as dead bait. No licensed bait dealer may intentionally cause or allow shrimp to die. The standards for bait dealership facilities are as follows: (1) Live bait shrimp facilities must be located within the salt waters of the state and must consist of either floating bait containers or tanks with circulating or recirculating systems to provide an exchange of salt waters; (2) Floating bait containers must be affixed to docks or structures attached to high ground above the high water mark and constructed with adequate openings to provide for a steady exchange of salt waters; (3) Tanks with circulating salt water systems must include adequate spray outlets to provide aeration as well as sufficient water inlets to create a circulating flow within the bait tank; (4) All live shrimp-holding facilities must be constructed of nontoxic materials or materials which have been properly treated with an approved

nontoxic substance. The facilities must be maintained in a condition conducive to keeping shrimp alive, which requires regular cleaning and the removal of dead shrimp; (5) No organism other than shrimp can be held in live shrimp bait tanks; (6) Freezer storage sufficient to freeze and to keep frozen any shrimp which die while in possession of a dealer and which are to be sold as dead bait must be maintained on the premises of the established bait dealership.

Any live bait shrimp dealership that is more than 1/2 mile from public saltwater angling access is required to maintain access to customers. Customers must be able to reach the dealership during all tide stages via a public launching facility, public fishing dock or platform or other forms of saltwater access during all tidal stages. Access by vehicle, as well as public parking, is also required at all times.

Any live bait dealership that derives a minimum of \$5,000 of earned income from the sale of recreational fishing supplies and accessories associated with saltwater angling is exempt from having to be within 1/2 mile of saltwater. In order to claim this exemption, a dealer must provide as evidence any records required by the DNR. All other requirements are in effect.

A bait dealer must permit inspection of the bait dealership by employees of DNR at any reasonable time. Failure to comply with this requirement is unlawful and grounds for forfeiture of the bait shrimping bond and license revocation.

It is unlawful to sell, unload, or otherwise dispose of shrimp taken for a bait dealership at any place other than the bait dealership for which the bait was taken. The only two exceptions are: (1) the transfer from a licensed bait boat to a DNR-approved vehicle (with such equipment to keep the shrimp alive) which will unload the shrimp at a bait dealership which is not located on the waterfront; and (2) the transfer of bait shrimp from one licensed bait dealer to another licensed bait dealer when DNR has been previously notified of the destination of the shrimp to be sold and the time and approximate amount of such sale, with permission of DNR to use whatever equipment is being used for transferring the shrimp.

Human Consumption Prohibited. Bait shrimp may never be sold or disposed of for human consumption. No one may possess bait shrimp intended for sale or distribution for human consumption. No bait dealer or

employee of a dealer may have or allow in or on the commercial fishing boat used for bait shrimping, or in or on the bait dealership premises, any shrimp to be used for human consumption. Possession of shrimp with heads off or more than 20 quarts of unlabeled, unpackaged, or unfrozen heads-on shrimp shall be prima-facie evidence that such shrimp are to be used for human consumption or are personally to be consumed.

Offloading. The docking and unloading of food shrimp trawl vessels is allowed. However, food shrimp may ONLY be off-loaded. Food shrimp may not be processed, stored, or sold for retail on the premises of the bait dealership. (O.C.G.A. 27-4-171; Board Rule 391-2-4-.14)

Areas, Seasons and Hours. All bait shrimp trawling is restricted to designated "Bait Zone" areas. Maps of the bait zones are available from CRD office in Brunswick. These areas may be opened and closed at the discretion of the DNR Commissioner based on sound biological, environmental, economic and social criteria set forth in state law (O.C.G.A. 27-4-171). The lawful hours for commercial bait shrimping (taking shrimp for sale as bait) are from one-half hour before official sunrise to one-half hour after official sunset.

Catch and Possession Limit. Fifty (50) quarts of shrimp is the maximum amount allowed for any commercial bait dealer to have on board the bait shrimping vessel. No more than 10% of those may be dead. No licensed bait dealership may have more than 200 quarts of live shrimp at any one time. No more than 10% may be dead, unless the excess dead shrimp are promptly packaged and properly frozen and labeled as "dead bait." Transportation and transfer between dealers are limited to 200 quarts.

Gear

Bait Trawl Boats. Established bait dealers may not operate more than one boat at a time in the taking of bait shrimp. The boat must have similar facilities as those for a time in the taking of bait shrimp alive. Equipment (including the boat) used for obtaining bait shrimp may not be used for any other commercial fishing purpose. Trawler licenses for bait shrimp trawling shall not be issued to any person who does not possess a valid bait dealer license unless such person is an employee of a licensed bait dealer.

Identification Boards. Each person taking bait shrimp for commercial purposes will be required to display an identification board on the bow or cabin of the boat.

Nets. A power-drawn net used for commercial bait shrimping may not be larger than twenty feet (20') at the widest part of its mouth. A twenty-foot net means a trawl with a cork line not to exceed 20 feet from tie-to-tie between the first and last mesh across the mouth of the net. The lead line may not exceed 25 feet from tie-to-tie between the first and last mesh across the mouth of the net, and leg lines of equal length. No webbing shall extend toward the doors beyond the original brail lines that run vertically between the first ties at each end of the cork line and the lead line. Mesh size must be between 1" and 1 3/8" stretch. A TED is not required due to the fact that a bait trawler cannot trawl for food shrimp and BRDs are not required due to the short tow times required to keep shrimp alive (50 CFR 223.205-207). More information regarding TED requirements can be found at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/bycatch/turtle-excluder-device-regulations>.

Records and Reporting. The bait dealer must maintain a daily record book showing, for each transaction, the amount of bait shrimp purchased, the person from whom it was purchased, and the date of the purchase, as well as the amount of live shrimp sold daily. The reports must include all transactions between licensed bait dealers, including the name of any dealership also acting as the seller in the transaction. These records must be submitted to CRD, Brunswick, Georgia by the 5th day of the following month. CRD will provide forms for reporting.

SUMMARY OF COMMERCIAL SHRIMPING REGULATIONS						
	Gear	Seasons/Hours	Catch Limits	Areas	Licenses	Bonds
Seines	Less than 100 ft. length. 1 1/4" min mesh	1/2 hr b/f sunrise 1/2 hr after sunset	24 qts. heads-on per person	Barrier Island beaches. Inlets/sloughs closed	Com Fish	No
Cast Nets	5/8" min. mesh	1/2 hr b/f sunrise 1/2 hr after sunset	150 qts. Heads/ person or boat. Beg Dec. 1 - 75 qts. Heads/ person or boat.	No closed areas unless noted during season extension	Com Cast Net; & Non-Trawler Vessel	No
Bait Shrimp Trawls	20' net max 1 - 1 3/8" mesh size	1/2 hr b/f sunrise 1/2 hr after sunset	Boat: 50 qts. Facility: 200 qts. (10% dead) dead packaged	Specified zones, creeks, and rivers only	Com Fish & Trawler Vessel	Yes, \$2,000
Food Shrimp Trawls	TEDs/BRDs 220' max foot rope / vessel, excludes trynet	Opened via Admin Order 1/2 hr b/f sunrise 1/2 hr after sunset	None	Sounds Closed; Beaches opened via Admin Order	Com Fish & Trawler Vessel	Yes, \$5,000

CRABS

O.C.G.A. 27-4-150, 27-4-151; Board Rule 391-2-4-.07

Hard Crabs

Licenses. The commercial blue crab fishery is regulated through a controlled access system with a limited number of licenses available. A commercial crabbing license is required for anyone fishing more than six (6) traps. Crab licenses must be renewed by May 1st each year, or the license will revert to DNR. The fishery is currently being reduced to a maximum of 100 licenses through attrition. Once 100 licenses have been reached, any un-renewed license will be re-issued by lottery. Until that time, new entrants may obtain a license by purchasing it from licensed crabber. The transfer must be registered with DNR within 30 days in order to be valid. The buyer must renew the license along with the applicable trap permits and boat license.

Commercial Trap Limits. There is a maximum limit of 200 crab traps that a commercial crabber can employ. Each commercial crabber must purchase commercial crab trap permits. Permits are issued in 50 trap increments at the time of purchase of the commercial crabbing license. This is the only time permits are sold. Individual permit quantities cannot be revised during a license year. There are harsh fines for persons who exceed the trap permit limit.

Commercial Crab Trap Construction. A commercial crab trap is an oblong cage or cubicle structure constructed of wooden slats, hardware cloth, chicken wire or other similar material with one or more tunnel-shaped entrances that limit exit. At least **two "Escape Rings"** must be installed on any of the four vertical, outside walls. The ring is a rigid, circular port forming the boundary of an opening and is placed flush with an outside surface of the crab trap in order to create an unobstructed opening through the wall of the trap. Each ring must measure at least 2 ³/₈ inches inside diameter. Escape rings may not be placed in the floor or ceiling of the trap.

Trap, Floats, and Identification. All commercial crab traps must have an attached float of a color other than green that is visible from a distance of 100 feet in clear weather at slack tide. Each float must be marked with the identification number assigned by DNR. Markings must be at least one inch (1") in height, with contrasting color to the float, and readable from left to right.

Vessel Identification. This same identification assigned to the crabber and placed on the float must also appear on the boat that is used to work the traps. The number must be placed on each side, on the forward one-third of the boat. The characters must be in block form, at least eight inches (8") in height, and must be of contrasting color to the background and must be readable from left to right. A crabbing boat may only have one identification number. However, alternate boats may be issued the same identification as long as only one of the boats is operated at any one time.

Permission to Pull Traps of Another. Commercial traps without the required identification issued by DNR will be seized as contraband. Harvesters must give DNR written notice via fax or mail when they have given someone permission to work their traps. The person given permission must have that permission in writing and on his person as well as a personal commercial fishing license. A licensed crabber working the traps of another

person by permission may not work the traps of any other person, including their own traps, at the same time. It is unlawful to take crabs from a commercial trap or to intentionally damage, destroy or remove any such crab trap or float of another commercial crabber.

NMFS Regulations to Protect Right Whales. All trap and pot gear placed in Atlantic Ocean waters (i.e., east of barrier island beaches and COLREG demarcations lines) from November 15 to April 15 must comply with NMFS gear regulations to protect endangered North Atlantic right whales. Crab pots may not be left unattended in federal ocean waters from November 15 to April 15. For more information about Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) regulations, please contact the DNR Wildlife Conservation Section Office in Brunswick at (912) 264-7355. ALWTRP Compliance Guides can also be downloaded from the NMFS website: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/marine-mammal-protection/atlantic-large-whale-take-reduction-plan-guides-trap-pot-fishermen.

Size and Catch Limits. Crabs measuring five inches (5") or more from spike to spike across the back are allowed to be harvested. Peelers that measure three inches (3") from spike to spike across the back, as well as mature adult female crabs of any size, may also be harvested. There are no quotas or quantity limits on the harvest of crabs taken commercially.

Sponge Crab Harvest Prohibited. The harvest and possession of any egg bearing female blue crab (sponge crab) is prohibited. When harvested during legal crabbing operations, the sponge crab must be immediately culled and returned to the water alive and unharmed. It is also unlawful to harm, molest, or remove the egg mass from the female crab. This change does not prohibit an individual from possessing and selling sponge crabs that were legally harvested from another state so long as proper documentation, such as a purchase invoice that demonstrates the point of origin, is provided to the conservation ranger. (Administrative Order)

Crab Harvester Reporting. All commercial crabbers must maintain a record book showing the name and address of the person or persons to whom crabs are sold, and such other information as may be required by the DNR. Persons failing to report crab harvest will be subject to penalties specified in law. All commercial crabbers must submit harvest records directly to DNR. To assist the industry in meeting this requirement,

DNR will provide daily harvest tickets that can be obtained at the Brunswick License Office. Reports for the previous month's harvest are due to DNR by the 10th day of the following month. Crabbers selling their catch to anyone other than a licensed seafood dealer is himself operating as a dealer and must purchase a Seafood Dealer License.

Areas. Commercial crab traps may be placed in waters described as "salt waters" in the Saltwater Demarcation Line Section and in the portion of the St. Mary's River and the Satilla River System (including the Satilla River and White Oak Creek) seaward of the Seaboard Coastline Railroad and in that portion of the Altamaha River System which is seaward of I-95. It shall be unlawful for any person to catch crabs for commercial purposes within 100 feet of the dock of any other person. It shall also be unlawful to place or set commercial crab traps in the channel of any stream when such channel has been marked by a lawfully established system of waterway markers.

Soft-Shell Crab Dealers and Harvesters

In addition to the above requirements of crab harvesters, the following apply specifically to soft-shell crabs.

Licenses. Soft-shelled crabs may only be sold to licensed soft-shell crab dealers. No one other than a licensed commercial crab fisherman or a licensed soft-shell crab dealer may possess peeler crabs in commercial quantities (a bushel or more). Only a licensed soft-shell crab dealer may operate a shedding facility. Soft-shell crab dealers may purchase peeler crabs only from licensed commercial crab fisherman or another soft-shell dealer, or from anyone outside of this state, with appropriate documentation.

Gear - Peeler Trap Specifications. In addition to the crab trap specifications list above, a "commercial peeler crab trap" deployed for taking "peeler crabs," whether for sale or not, must be constructed with a minimum one-inch (1") mesh size. Its maximum dimensions are 24" x 24" x 24." Peeler traps can only be baited with live, legal-sized, male blue crab and are exempt from the escape ring requirement. Other baits, including fish or other organisms, may not be used for peeler traps and, if used, is prima-facie evidence of a violation of the rule.

CRAB, JELLYFISH, AND WHELK TRAWLING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-133

Licenses

Each person engaged in commercial trawling for crab, jellyfish, and whelk is required to have a commercial fishing license with species endorsements, unless covered under a vessel crew license. A commercial trawler boat license is also needed before fishing with power drawn nets in Georgia waters. Each commercial trawler must also display an identification board.

Areas and Seasons

The DNR Commissioner may open and close any of the state's waters on the seaward side of the sounds to crab, jellyfish, or whelk at any time of the year. Additionally, the Commissioner may open and close the waters of Cumberland, St. Simons, Sapelo, St. Andrew, Wassaw, or Ossabaw Sounds to crab, jellyfish, or whelk during the months of January, February, and March. When opened, power-drawn nets may be used to take crab, jellyfish, or whelk between 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset. Trawling at night is prohibited in state waters.

Gear

Net Sizes. A power-drawn net used for taking crab, jellyfish, or whelk must be made of at least four-inch (4") stretch mesh webbing. Possession of any net with mesh smaller than 4 inches (4") while waters are open specifically for the taking of crabs, jellyfish, or whelks shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of O.C.G.A 27-4-133 f.

Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). Commercial crab, jellyfish, or whelk trawlers must have a certified TED in each net. Three TED models are certified by DNR for use in Georgia waters for crab, jellyfish, or whelk trawling. These are the N.C. Flounder TED and two modified versions of the N.C. Flounder TED. Contact DNR for information on TED specifications. **Note:** There is no minimum size for whelks. BRDs are not required in crab, jellyfish, or whelk trawls.

BAIT MINNOW TRAPPING

Board Rule 391-2-4-.11

Definition

“Bait Minnow” means any member of the family Fundulidae, including, but not limited to, mummichog killifishes, commonly known as mud minnows.

Licenses

Commercial fishing for “Bait Minnows” in Georgia’s salt waters requires a commercial fishing license, a commercial bait dealer license, and a commercial non-trawler boat license, if a boat is used in the collection of minnows. Additionally, the bait facility must meet the requirements for a live bait shrimp facility.

An employee of a licensed bait dealer who possesses a valid personal commercial fishing license and a bait minnow endorsement may work the bait minnow traps for their employer. Only persons possessing a valid wholesale fish dealer license are allowed to resell commercially harvested bait minnows. Harvester/dealer reporting is required.

Gear - Bait Minnow Traps

Traps used to harvest bait minnows can be either a rectangular cage constructed of hardware cloth, wire, plastic or similar material with its size not exceeding 24” x 18” x 9”, or a cylindrical trap of the same materials with a maximum size of 24” in length and 30” in circumference. The mesh size

on all commercial traps cannot be smaller than 1/2” bar mesh, except for the funnel or muzzle which cannot be smaller than 1/4” bar mesh. The round throat opening cannot exceed 1” in diameter. Each trap must have an attached tag or float bearing the name, address, and commercial bait dealer license number of the owner of the trap. No licensed bait dealership may employ more than 10 traps at any given time regardless of the number of employees working those traps.

Limits

One hundred (100) quarts of bait minnows is the maximum possession limit for any licensed bait dealer or wholesale fish dealer at any time.

Mandatory Records

A licensed bait dealer must maintain a daily record book showing the amount of bait minnows harvested and sold daily. Written reports shall be submitted to DNR no later than the fifth day of the following month in a format established by DNR.

HORSESHOE CRABS

O.C.G.A. 27-4-71; Board Rule 391-2-4-.15

Licenses

A commercial fishing license and a horseshoe crab endorsement is required in order to harvest horseshoe crab(s) to be used or sold as bait. If a boat is used, a commercial boat license (trawler or non-trawler depending on gear) is required. Harvester/dealer reporting is required.

Areas and Seasons

The taking of horseshoe crabs for bait is allowed only when the salt waters of this state are open to the taking of shrimp, whelk, or blue crab by trawling.

Limits

No one may possess more than 25 horseshoe crabs at any one time, nor may there be more than 75 horseshoe crabs on board a commercial vessel, provided there are at least three commercially licensed persons onboard. Horseshoe crabs taken incidentally during legal fishing operations for other marine species may be on board a vessel provided that horseshoe crabs in excess of the above limits are immediately returned to the water without being intentionally or negligently harmed by the harvester or the equipment being used.

Biomedical Harvest

DNR may issue a Medical Takings Permit, allowing the harvest of horseshoe crabs in excess of the limit when used for the production of Limulus Amebocyte Lysate (LAL). Horseshoe crabs taken and possessed for biomedical use must be returned alive to state waters of comparable salinity and water quality as soon as is feasible after collection of their blood. Contact CRD in Brunswick (912-264-7218) for information on Medical Taking Permits.

Other Restrictions

The interstate import of horseshoe crabs is legal provided that a bona fide bill of lading accompanies the crabs as proof that they were not taken or transported in violation of this law or the laws of the jurisdiction from which the horseshoe crabs originated.

AMERICAN EEL

O.C.G.A. 27-4-71; Board Rule 391-2-4-.01

Licenses

Commercial fishing for adult eels in the salt waters of Georgia requires a commercial fishing license and an eel endorsement). If a boat is used, a commercial non-trawler boat license is required. Harvester/dealer reporting is required.

Size Limits

Commercial harvest of eels is limited to adult eels which shall mean eels at least nine inches in length.

Areas

It is legal to fish commercially for adult eels in any salt waters of this state except as specifically prohibited below.

- Savannah River from the saltwater demarcation line to a point one-half mile below the Stevens Creek Reservoir Dam;
- Ogeechee River from the saltwater demarcation line to the U. S. Highway 25 bridge at Millen;
- Altamaha River from the saltwater demarcation line to the confluence of the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers;
- Oconee River from the confluence of the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers to a point one-half mile below Lake Sinclair Dam;
- Ocmulgee River from the confluence of the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers to a point one-half mile below Juliette Dam;
- Satilla River from the saltwater demarcation line to the U. S. Highway 84 bridge at Waycross;
- St. Mary's River from the saltwater demarcation line to the Georgia Highway 94 bridge near St. George.

Gear

Legal traps for adult eels are rectangular traps no larger than 24" X 24" X 15" and cylindrical traps no larger than 15" nor smaller than 9" in diameter, and no greater than 36" in length. Each type of gear must have:

- a mesh size no smaller than 1" x 1/2," except for the throat or muzzle and the end opposite the throat or muzzle of cylindrical traps;
- around opening, the size limited by a 2" diameter steel ring securely attached to the material of which the muzzle or throat is constructed;
- an attached tag and non-green float bearing the name, address and commercial fishing license number of the person using such pot or trap.

Other Restrictions

All fish other than adult eels 9" or greater, caught in any trap set for eels, must be returned to the water immediately at the place the trap has been fished.

SHAD

O.C.G.A. 27-4-71; Board Rule 391-2-4-.02

Licenses

A commercial fishing license and a shad endorsement is required by anyone fishing commercially for shad. If a boat is used in salt water, a commercial non-trawler boat license is required. Harvester/Dealer reporting is required. A letter of authorization may be required. Contact CRD in Brunswick (912-264-7218) for more information.

Seasons

Shad season is open January 1 through March 31 each year with the DNR Commissioner able to extend the season up to 30 days beyond March 31. The season is closed May 1 through December 31. Waters open to commercial shad fishing include:

Areas

Savannah River System. The Savannah River downstream of the U.S. Highway 301 bridge, Collis Creek, Albercorn Creek, Front River, Middle River, Steamboat River, McCoy's Cut, Hometown Cut, Back River upstream from Corps of Engineers New Savannah Cut, New Savannah Cut, North Channel Savannah River downstream to a line running due south of the easternmost tip of Oyster Bed Island, South Channel Savannah River

downstream to a line running from the southeast tip of Cockspur Island to the mouth of Lazaretto Creek, and Elba Island Cut between North and South Channels of the Savannah River.

The Savannah River system downstream from the I-95 bridge will be open to commercial shad fishing Tuesday through Friday each week. Upstream of the I-95 bridge it will be open Wednesday through Saturday each week.

Altamaha River System. The Ochoopee River upstream to the U.S. Highway 1 bridge; the Altamaha River downstream of the from U.S. Highway 1 bridge including Cobb Creek Oxbow, Beards Creek from its mouth upstream to the Long-Tatnall County line (Big Lake), Sturgeon Hole from the Altamaha River to the lower mouth of Harper Slough, Old Woman's Pocket, South Branch, General's Cut, South Altamaha River, Champney River, Butler River, One Mile Cut, Wood Cut, Darien River upstream to the confluence Darien Creek and Cathead Creek, Buttermilk Sound upstream to the mouth of Hampton River, Hampton River, Altamaha sound to the sound/beach boundary, Rockdedundy River, Little Mud River, South River, Back River, North River upstream to Hird Island Creek and Doboy Sound from the sound/beach boundary upstream to a line from range F1 R4 sec A across buoy R "178" to Sapelo Island. Old River and Mid Slough of the Penholoway River and Ellis Creek are closed to commercial shad fishing. The Altamaha River system downstream from the Seaboard Coastline Railroad bridge (at Altamaha Park) will be open to commercial shad fishing Monday through Friday each week. Upstream of this point will be open Tuesday through Saturday each week.

Gear

Set nets and drift nets of at least 4 1/2-inch stretch mesh or trot lines (in accordance with O.C.G.A. 27-4-91) may be used to fish commercially for shad. Nets may only be set or fished in flowing water within the banks of a stream channel. Nets may not be used in non-flowing waters such as sloughs or dead oxbow lakes.

ONLY DRIFT NETS may be used in the Savannah River system downstream of a line between the mouth of Knoxborough Creek and McCoy's Cut at Deadman's Point; Altamaha Sound; and Doboy Sound.

Set nets must be placed at least 600 feet apart and are limited to 100 feet in length. Set nets must have one end of mesh or webbing of the net secured to the stream's bank and buoyed at the outer (streamward) end so as to be

clearly visible to boaters. Drift nets shall not be fished closer than 300 feet apart and are limited to a maximum of 1,000 feet in length in salt waters. Set and drift nets must be situated so as to allow one-half the stream width to be open and free for the passage of fish. All shad nets must have a permanent tag showing the commercial fisherman's name, address and commercial fishing license number.

Other Restrictions

Sturgeon, gamefish other than American shad and hickory shad, and all species of catfish taken in shad nets, must be immediately released unharmed into the waters from which they were taken.

CATFISH FISHING

O.C.G.A. 27-4-71; Board Rule 391-2-4-.13

Licenses

Commercial fishing for catfish in the saltwaters of this state requires a commercial fishing license and a catfish in saltwater endorsement. If a boat is used, a commercial non-trawler boat license is required. Harvester/dealer reporting is required.

Areas Open to Commercial Fishing for Catfish in Saltwater

Except as otherwise provided herein, all salt waters of this state shall be open to the taking of catfish for commercial purposes. It shall be unlawful to commercially fish for catfish in the North Altamaha River, except on the ocean side (downstream) of the mouth of, but not including, Lewis Creek. Such fishing shall also be unlawful in the South Altamaha, except on the ocean side (downstream) of the uppermost entrance of Hammersmith Creek.

Commercial Gear for Taking Catfish in Saltwater

It shall be unlawful for any person to commercially fish for catfish in the salt waters of this state with any gear except the following:

- trotlines;
- wire baskets meeting the requirements of Code Section 27-4-92 and having a non-green colored float attached bearing the corresponding commercial fishing license number in one-inch letters of contrasting color; and

- hoop nets of one inch on the square (two inches stretch) or larger which do not exceed three- and one-half feet in diameter or ten feet in length.

Minimum Sizes

It shall be unlawful for any person commercially fishing for catfish in the salt waters of this state to take and retain any catfish less than nine inches in total length. Any catfish taken and retained by such person shall be deemed to be less than nine inches if it is less than seven inches with head removed or less than six inches with head and tail removed.

GIGGING

Board Rule 391-2-4-.12

Only flounder may be taken with a gig in salt waters of Georgia. Anyone commercially gigging for flounder must purchase a commercial fishing license and a finfish endorsement. If using a boat, a non-trawler boat license is required. Harvester/Dealer reporting is required.

CLAMS AND OYSTERS

O.C.G.A. 27-4-187 – 27-4-204; Board Rule 391-2-4

General Regulations

In Georgia, commercial shellfish harvesters must obtain a harvesters permit to participate in wild harvest and mariculture of both Eastern Oysters and Hard Clams. The Coastal Resources Division Shellfish and Water Quality Program is responsible for permitting commercial harvest areas, offering leases for commercial shellfish harvest and monitoring the water quality in shellfish growing areas among other shellfish-related activities. For more information on the Program and the requirements of shellfish farmers in Georgia, please view the website below to see the most recent version of Policy Manual and view more information about obtaining a commercial shellfish harvest area:
<https://coastalgadnr.org/commercialshellfishharvest/>.

Shellfish are defined as clams, oysters, mussels, or any bivalve mollusk inhabiting the coastal estuaries, marshes, or beaches of coastal Georgia (O.C.G.A 27-1-2). Commercial shellfish harvest or culture is only permitted on leases acknowledged and permitted by the State of Georgia.

All shellfish must be harvested between the hours of 1/2 hour before official sunrise and 1/2 hour after official sunset and may only be taken by hand or with handheld implements.

Minimum Commercial Harvest Sizes

- Eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) – 2 inches, hinge to mouth
- Hard clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) – 3/4 inch depth (perpendicular to hinge).

SEA TURTLES

Board Rule 391-4-10-.06, 391-4-10-.09

It is unlawful for any person to sell or offer for sale any sea turtles or to offer for sale, sell, or destroy any sea turtle eggs. **Sea turtles are protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act as well as state rules.** It is unlawful to possess sea turtle parts without appropriate permits.

MARINE MAMMALS

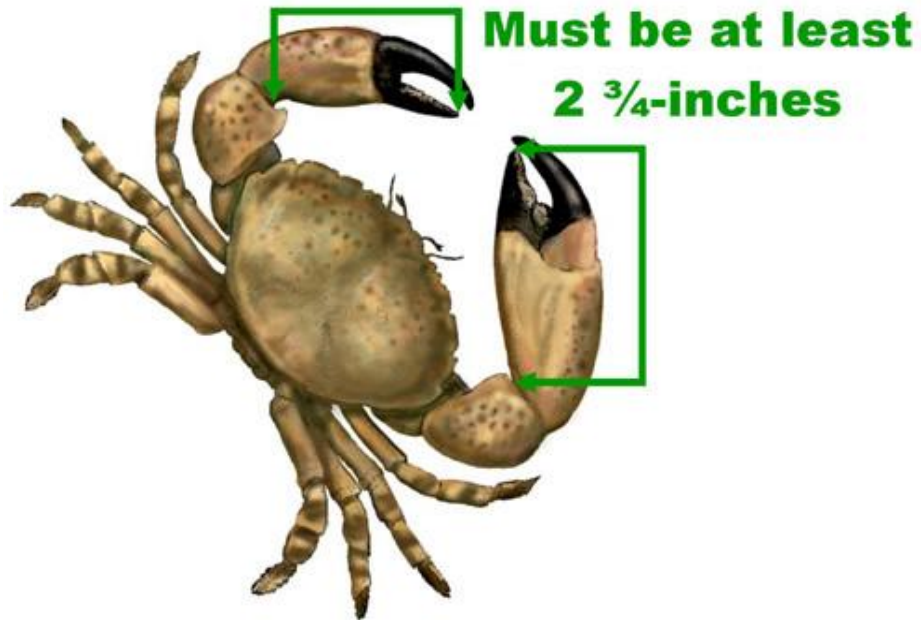
Board Rule 391-4-10-.06, 391-4-10-.09

It is unlawful for any person to net, trap, harpoon, molest, display, feed or otherwise interfere with the well-being or normal activity of marine mammals including bottlenose & spotted dolphin, manatee, and any species of whale. **The Federal Marine Mammal Protection Act protects marine mammals.** It is also unlawful to possess marine mammal parts without appropriate permits. **Report sightings of dead or injured marine mammals to 1-800-241-4113.**

STONE CRABS

Georgia does not regulate stone crab harvest, yet there are voluntary measures that can help conserve stone crabs. First, never take the whole crab. Remove only one claw that has reached at least 2 3/4 inches in length. The measurement is taken by straight line from the elbow to the tip of the lower immovable finger. Removal should consist of a quick twist of the joint separating it from the body. A properly removed claw should not have meat from the body attached to it. If properly removed, the crab will automatically retract the muscle and a protective film will seal the wound. Stone crab claws are a renewable resource because only the claw is harvested, and the crab is left to regenerate a new claw. Should both claws be of lawful harvest size and removed, the crab would be left with little means of defense

and no mode of acquiring food. This drastically reduces its chance for survival and re-growth of a new claw is highly compromised without a proper nutrient supply.



GEORGIA FINFISH HARVEST REGULATIONS

SPECIES	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT AND POSSESSION LIMIT	MINIMUM SIZE (INCHES)
Amberjack*	All year	1	28 FL
American Eel	All year	25	9 TL
Atlantic croaker	All year	25	No Limit
Atlantic sturgeon	No Harvest		
Billfish (Blue marlin, White marlin, Sailfish)*	Catch and Release Only		
Black drum	All year	15	14 TL
Black sea bass*	All year	15	12 TL
Bluefish	All year	15	12 FL
Cobia	Mar. 1 - Oct. 31	1 per angler, max 6 per boat.	36 FL
Dolphin*	All year	10 (Not to exceed 60 per boat, except for headboats which are allowed 10 per paying customer.	20 FL
Flounder	All year	15	12 TL
Gag grouper*	All year	2	24 TL
King mackerel*	All year	3	24 FL
Red drum (Channel bass, Spottail bass, Redfish)**	All year	5	14 TL (23 TL maximum)
Red pogy*	All year	3	14 TL
Red snapper*	All year	2	20 TL
Sharks (other than Hammerheads, SSC and Prohibited Sharks) ^A	All Year	1 per angler or boat, whichever is less	54 FL 83 FL (Shortfin Mako)
Sharks: Hammerheads (Great, Scalloped, and Smooth) ^A	All Year	1 per angler or boat, whichever is less	78 FL
Small shark composite (SSC) ^A (Atlantic sharpnose, Bonnethead, Spiny dogfish)	All Year	1 per angler	30 FL
Prohibited Sharks (NO HARVEST) ^A	Sand tiger, Sandbar, Silky, Bigeye sand tiger, Whale, Basking, White, Dusky, Bignose, Galapagos, Night, Reef, Narrowtooth, Caribbean sharpnose, Smalltail, Atlantic angel, Longfin mako, Bigeye thresher, Sharpnose sevengill, Bluntnose sixgill, Oceanic Whitetip, and Bigeye sixgill		
Sheepshead	All year	15	10 FL
Spanish mackerel*	All year	15	12 FL
Spot	All year	25	
Spotted seatrout	All year	15	14 TL
Striped bass (Saltwater)	All year	2	22 TL
Striped bass (Savannah River)	All year	2	27 TL
Tarpon	All year	1	68 FL
Tripletail	All year	2	18 TL
Weakfish	All year	1	13 TL
<p>* These species are also federally managed from 3 to 200 miles offshore. Go to www.safmc.net for federal regulations.</p> <p>** Red Drum are a gamefish in Georgia [O.C.G.A. 27-1-2 (36)(I)]. As gamefish, Red Drum may only be fished for with <u>A</u> These species are also federally managed. Go to www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-minimum-sizes-and-bag-limits for federal regulations.</p>			

This brochure is intended as a pocket guide to the laws and regulations that govern the major commercial saltwater fishing activities along the Georgia coast. For exact wording of the fishing laws and regulations, see the *Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.)* and the current copy of the *Department of Natural Resources Regulations*.

The Georgia Secretary of State's office provides free and open access to all Georgia laws and regulations through a service company, *LexisNexis*. The links are:

- O.C.G.A.: [http:// www.lexisnexus.com](http://www.lexisnexus.com)
- GA DNR Board Rules: <http://rules.sos.ga.gov/gac/391>



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