

June 29, 2016

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman, Senate Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member, Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
426 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson,

We, the undersigned anglers and life-long users of Biscayne National Park (BNP), write to you in strong opposition to S. 3099 – “Access for Sportfishing Act of 2016.” The proposed legislation could prevent the National Park Service (NPS) from protecting Biscayne’s severely threatened coral reef ecosystem. The bill could block NPS from implementing a desperately needed marine reserve and prevent them from fulfilling their legal duty to protect the resources of America’s national parks for current and future generations. Fishing and boating are of great importance to us, and we view the protection of coral reefs and native fish populations as a way to ensure our children and grandchildren have access to the same incredible fishing opportunities that we enjoy.

We have been fishing in Biscayne National Park for decades and understand that high-quality fishing is linked to healthy habitat. In recent years, Biscayne has experienced a severe decline in fish populations and the health of coral reef habitats. These declines threaten the future of fishing. We understand that, at times, regulations are indeed necessary to protect the environment in and around our national parks. This bill could prevent NPS from implementing the marine reserve and block them from taking any action necessary to protect the fundamental resources of the park. Protective action needs to be taken if we want future generations to have the opportunity to enjoy fishing in our national parks.

The recreational fishing industry is extremely important to many local economies and a decline in the health of fisheries and habitat is detrimental to local business. If we fail to protect coral reefs and native fish, people will no longer be able to fish in our communities and will be forced to go elsewhere, taking their money with them. We cannot be shortsighted in our approach to resource management. We need to understand that conservation now will help to ensure the health of our fisheries for decades to come.

Plans to create a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park were based on sound science, years of community engagement, strong public support, and collaboration with state agencies. A failure to create a marine reserve soon will result in the continued decline in the health of coral reefs and fishing opportunities in Biscayne National Park.

As anglers dedicated to preserving and protecting the quality of fishing opportunities in and around our national parks for our children and grandchildren, we strongly urge you to oppose S. 3099.

Sincerely,

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Captain Gil Muratori
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Selected by the International Game Fish Association to its Hall of Fame as a "Legendary Captain" 2014
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