



## Ocean Reef Conservation Association

June 28, 2016

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

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

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson,

The Ocean Reef Conservation Association (ORCA) writes to you in strong opposition of S. 3099, "Access for Sportfishing Act of 2016." This bill could block the implementation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park (BNP), designed to protect the park's failing coral reef ecosystem and declining native fish populations. We support the National Park Service's decision to create a marine reserve in order to protect Biscayne's imperiled marine resources and improve the visitor experience. We are committed to the protection and long-term sustainability of Biscayne National Park and are deeply concerned that this bill could prevent the National Park Service from fulfilling its duty to protect national park resources in perpetuity for all Americans.

Ocean Reef is located south of Biscayne National Park in northern Key Largo and our community depends on access to healthy and sustainable marine resources. Our members deeply value recreation activities in BNP, including fishing, boating, scuba diving, and snorkeling. We believe that the marine

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reserve balances coral reef protection and continued access to prized fishing opportunities throughout the park. Instituting practical conservation measures now will prevent the need for more drastic, wide-reaching regulations in the future. The marine reserve will not only improve the visitor experience overall, but will also benefit recreational anglers, who will see more and larger fish spillover from marine reserve boundaries into surrounding areas.

Biscayne's General Management Plan (GMP) was developed with strong stakeholder input and close collaboration with the State of Florida. When the State voiced their initial objections to the marine reserve, the Park Service worked closely with them for an additional two years to come up with alternatives that were mutually agreeable by NPS and the State. Unfortunately, the alternatives they came up with failed to protect the coral reefs *and* failed to satisfy the public.

We strongly believe that the marine reserve is the best and only option for protecting Biscayne's coral reef ecosystem. Rapid declines in coral health and native fish populations have severely diminished the health of Biscayne. We cannot afford any more delays to action. This bill could not only block the implementation of the marine reserve, but could also prevent the Park Service from fulfilling their legal duty to protect and preserve the resources of Biscayne National Park. We strongly oppose this damaging and overreaching bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John J. Curlett", written over a horizontal line.

John J. Curlett  
President

JJC/n