



## Ocean Reef Conservation Association

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September 8, 2016

The Honorable Carlos Curbelo  
United States House of Representatives  
1429 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
United States House of Representatives  
2206 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Curbelo and Ros-Lehtinen,

The Ocean Reef Conservation Association (ORCA) writes to you in strong opposition of H.R. 5771, "Conserving Our Reefs and Livelihoods Act of 2016" (CORAL Act), a reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. Despite the fact that it contains some positive provisions for coral reefs, Section 302 of the bill would block the implementation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park (BNP) and undermine the ability of the National Park Service (NPS) to protect marine resources in America's national parks. We support the National Park Service's decision to create a marine reserve to protect Biscayne's threatened coral reef ecosystem and reef fish populations. We are committed to protecting BNP for both present and future generations and are concerned that this bill could prevent the Park Service from fulfilling its duty to protect national park resources for all Americans.

Ocean Reef is located in northern Key Largo, just south of Biscayne National Park and depends on access to vibrant marine resources, including healthy fish populations and coral reefs. Our community deeply values recreation opportunities in BNP, such as boating, fishing, snorkeling, and scuba diving. The Park Service's decision to create a marine reserve balances the need for access to prized fishing opportunities throughout most of the park and the need for necessary protections for its coral reef ecosystem. The implementation of practical conservation measures now will prevent the need for drastic, wide-reaching regulations in the future. Creating a marine reserve in Biscayne will improve the overall visitor experience and also benefit recreational anglers through the spillover effect, when more and larger fish swim from within the boundaries of the marine reserve into surrounding areas.

The decision to create a marine reserve was based on strong stakeholder input and public support (over 90% of comments were in favor of the creation of a marine reserve) and close collaboration with the State of Florida. When the State initially objected to the marine reserve, the Park Service spent two years working directly with the State to come up with two new alternatives. Unfortunately, the new alternatives failed to provide enough protection for Biscayne's coral reef ecosystem *and* failed to satisfy the public.

We strongly believe that the marine reserve is the best 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. Section 302 of this bill would not only block the implementation of the marine reserve, but could also prevent the Park Service from fulfilling its legal duty to protect and preserve the resources of national parks around the country. We strongly oppose this damaging provision in the CORAL Act.

Sincerely,



Jack Curlett  
President

JJC/n