

CALIFORNIA
COASTKEEPER.
ALLIANCE



INLAND EMPIRE WATERKEEPER.



April 28, 2016

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Ranking Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-6150

RE: OPPOSE S. 2807

Dear Senator Boxer:

California Coastkeeper Alliance and our twelve member Waterkeeper organizations, and many other statewide and national organizations worked with communities and organizations throughout the state for more than a decade to establish California's network of marine reserves and protected areas. These hope spots are critical areas where marine ecosystems can recover from overfishing and pollution, making our ocean more resilient to climate change. On behalf of the undersigned organizations, and the thousands of California constituents we represent, we are writing in strong opposition to S. 2807, which would limit the National Park Service's ability to develop protections for marine reserves and specially protected areas.

California's ocean and coast are our state's most valuable natural capital, supporting a \$40 billion ocean economy. However, the state's marine ecosystems are threatened by habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, and overfishing. Combined, these stressors can have dramatic impacts on our marine ecosystems, and consequently our ocean economy. For example, a warming ocean combined with land-based nutrient pollution led to the buildup of domoic acid, also known as harmful algae blooms or red tides, which caused the closure of California's \$60 million crab fishery. Protecting California's vibrant ocean economy is critical to our way of life.

In order to protect California's marine ecosystems and allow our ocean economy to thrive, agencies need to deploy management tools that can make the marine environment more resilient to threats and change. Marine protected areas (MPAs) safeguard critical ocean habitat, allowing sensitive marine communities such as rocky reefs and seagrass beds to thrive and recover. These special places also protect biological hotspots and important foraging grounds. This, in turn, benefits a range of species, including plants, like bull kelp; invertebrates, like sea stars; and marine mammals, such as seals and otters. Underwater parks offer a home and refuge for larger, adult fish to recover, grow, and replenish our oceans.

California became the first state in the nation to establish a system of MPAs—similar to national parks and forests on land—to protect and restore ocean habitats and increase the health, productivity, and resilience of ocean ecosystems. The state completed the coastal network of MPAs in 2012, creating over 120 underwater refuges along California's coast, extending from Oregon to Mexico. Although California's MPAs are relatively young, positive benefits are already evident. Early scientific monitoring results from the Central Coast and the Channel Islands MPAs demonstrate that the protected areas are already resulting in more and larger fish and invertebrates—trends that are expected to continue and increase over time.

S. 2807 would limit the National Parks Service's ability to add additional protections to California's marine reserves and would undermine the Service's authority to create new marine protections under national park jurisdiction. It would strip the NPS of its legal responsibility, under the 1916 Organic Act, to set reasonable limits on fishing to prevent overfishing, restore fish populations and habitats, and protect marine and lakeshore wildlife.

The importance of marine protected areas and reserves in protecting California's ocean economy underscores our belief that the federal government should retain its authority to protect national park areas. We believe that California, and all coastal states, should be able to defend their economy and environment through the establishment of marine reserves. For example, in Florida, S. 2807 would derail the final and fully vetted

management plan for Biscayne National Park, which was based on scientific analysis, years of interagency cooperation, and strong public support. The plan includes the creation of a marine reserve to provide desperately needed protection for Biscayne's threatened coral reef ecosystem and marine wildlife. Habitat for threatened species such as elkhorn and staghorn coral, reef fish, and sea turtles will be greatly impacted if Biscayne National Park is unable to create a protective marine reserve.

Nationwide, and here in California, underwater parks are essential to restore our vulnerable ocean ecosystems and threatened marine life. We believe that S. 2807 would create unnecessary barriers to the development, adoption and implementation of marine reserves around the country, and respectfully urge you to oppose S. 2807.

Sincerely,

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California Coastkeeper Alliance

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Executive Director & CEO
Orange County Coastkeeper & Inland Empire Waterkeeper

Mati Waiya
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