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Testimony of Dr. Martin Arostegui and Captain Gil Muratori
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and
the House Committee on Small Business
“Joint Oversight Hearing”

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Chairman Bishop, Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Grijalva, Ranking Member Velazquez, and members of the committees – thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the hearing titled, “Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment.”

We, the undersigned anglers and life-long users of Biscayne National Park, write to you in strong support of the creation of a no-take marine reserve in Biscayne National Park. Fishing and boating are of great importance to us and we view the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park as a way to ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to the same incredible fishing opportunities that we have enjoyed.

Marty Arostegui: I am a medical doctor, formally serving as the Past Chief of Staff of Cedars Medical Center. I am also a holder of 440 International Game Fish Association World Records. Alarmed by the decline of our fisheries in South Florida, I took it upon myself to study multiple scientific publications on marine reserves and studies outlining the decline of fish populations in South Florida. I also interviewed marine scientists from NOAA, University of Miami and Stanford University on the topic of marine reserves. I am now convinced that we need to establish marine reserves in order to stop the environmental degradation that has been occurring for the past few decades in South Florida’s coastal waters.

Captain Gil Muratori: I am the past President of the Metropolitan South Florida Fishing Tournament and am a volunteer educator at Biscayne and Everglades National Parks. I also currently serve on the Advisory Committee for the Miami-Dade County Chapter of Sea Grant Florida. I have fished in South Florida waters for over 35 years and am interested in creating a marine reserve to ensure the availability of fish for future generations. My travels have brought me in contact with anglers from around the globe, who have told me that marine reserves do work.

We have been fishing the waters of Biscayne National Park for decades and have seen the decline in the health of Biscayne’s fisheries and coral reefs with our own eyes. Years ago, the waters within the park were filled with large grouper, mutton snapper, and grunts. Healthy coral reefs were filled with fish. Today, conditions are drastically different. The vast majority of mutton snapper, mangrove snapper, and hogfish are undersized and you rarely see grouper. Strong action needs to be taken *now* if we want our children and grandchildren to have the opportunity to enjoy fishing in Biscayne National Park.

South Florida is the fishing and boating capital of the world and the recreational fishing industry is extremely important to our local economy. We need to consider the impacts of a continued decline in the health of corals and fisheries on our economy. If people are no longer able to catch fish here, they will go somewhere else, taking their money and business with them. We cannot be shortsighted in our approach to resource management. We need to understand that conserving a small portion of our reef now will help to ensure the health of our fisheries for decades to come. Marine reserves work and some of the best fishing in the world is located just outside their borders.

After seeing the benefits of marine reserves firsthand, we teamed up to develop a presentation explaining the science behind marine reserves and the way they work to benefit fishing. Over the past year, we have been presenting these results to fishing clubs and community groups all over South Florida, educating other anglers and citizens about how we can improve the future of fishing in Florida. We truly believe that a marine reserve covering just 6% of Biscayne National Park's waters, which still allows for recreational fishing in the majority of the park, is our best bet to reversing the rapid decline in local fisheries.

Finally, we are extremely concerned about the proposed "Preserving Public Access to Public Waters Act" and the roadblocks it could put in place preventing the National Park Service from protecting some of America's most treasured natural resources. We need to trust the National Park Service, as stewards of our national parks, to make the decisions necessary to protect these parks according to their expertise and scientific data. We urge you to support the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.