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**Testimony of Michelle Metcalf  
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and  
the House Committee on Small Business  
“Joint Oversight Hearing”**

**August 3, 2015**

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.” The Biscayne Bay Coalition, established in 2008, is made up of 12 core non-profit members and the thousand of citizens we represent. Our Mission is to unite the Miami community to protect, restore, and enhance Biscayne Bay for future generations. We have been advocating for a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park since before the public meeting began for the general management plan. We strongly support the establishment of a marine reserve and no take zone within Biscayne National Park.

Biscayne National Park is the largest marine park in the National Park System, created to protect, “a rare combination of terrestrial, marine, and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty” for present and future generations.

Biscayne National Park has been overfished and overstressed for decades since the establishment of the park in 1980. Scientific research clearly indicates that critical park resources are severely threatened, some on the verge of “imminent collapse.” According to a former park scientist, “the whole system is in jeopardy” including the important commercial and recreational species such as snapper and grouper<sup>1</sup>.

A marine reserve is a “no take” area that restores the marine ecosystem health and protects both the wildlife and habitats in the prospected area. Marine reserves are one of the quickest

<sup>1</sup> Ault, J. A., Smith, S. G., Meester, G. A., Luo, J. and Bohnsack, J. A., Site Characterization for Biscayne National Park: Assessment of Fisheries Resources and Habitats, iii-iv, 2001.  
<sup>2</sup> Johns, et. al., Socioeconomic Study of Reefs in Southeast Florida, Final Report 2001.  
<sup>3</sup> 2006 National Park Service (NPS) Management Policies, at § 1.4.5  
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service & Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Implementing the Dry Tortugas National Park Research Natural Area Science Plan: The Five Year Report, 2012, 4- 13. Ibid., 24-27.

and most effective science-based solutions for conserving the future health and sustainability of Biscayne's coral reef ecosystem.

Marine reserves are based on science and years of research worldwide have shown their benefits. There is a scientific consensus that marine reserves are the quickest, cheapest and most effective method for conserving and sustaining coral reef ecosystems and fish populations.

For example, the marine reserve in Dry Tortugas National Park<sup>4</sup>, which is supported by the state of Florida and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, have shown increase fish size which helps to ensure reproductive success and successful recruitment to adjacent areas only five years after its creation<sup>4</sup>. In addition, these havens provide safe nurseries that will help compensate for reduced number of mangrove-lined coastal areas lost to seawalls in Florida.

The marine reserve at Biscayne National Park will cover 6% of the park and should use the established baseline to implement a robust monitoring program to show the success rate. We feel these measures are necessary to reverse the significant decline in biodiversity that has been documented by scientists such as Joan Browder, Joe Serafy and Jerry Ault.

At the hearing, it was stated that the marine reserve will work against public interest but according to the Organic Act<sup>3</sup>, the National Park System is to be protected for "the common benefit of all the people of the United States," not just for single user groups. The marine reserve is going just that. It will allow for other recreation users such as divers, snorkelers, swimmers and boaters the opportunity to experience a vibrant, healthy coral reef ecosystem that is not damaged.

An economic study prepared by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration indicated that no financial losses were reported by recreational or commercial fishers in the area and commercial catches of reef fish actually increased in the region<sup>2</sup>. Similar protections are urgently needed to protect the threatened resources of Biscayne National Park.

We strongly support the creation of a marine reserve to protect Biscayne National Park's treasured system of threatened reef fisheries and coral reef ecosystems.

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