

Dear Mr. Stickler,

I write for the public record, concerning the proposed Marine Reserve in Biscayne National Park.

As a scientist who enjoys recreational fishing and fine dining, I am a huge fan of protected marine reserves, despite the slightly reduced fishing space they afford. I understand that some opposition to this proposed preserve originates from recreational and commercial anglers. While fishermen have proven extremely effective at finding and catching fish, they have proven completely ineffective at protecting and preserving marine fish stocks. The collapse of the great Atlantic fisheries should be adequate testament to that truth. However, looking locally, you will also see that fish stocks have declined steadily in size and numbers. Commercial fisherman and guides direct their efforts on the spawning beds because that's where the fish are most easily located and caught. Of course, that's also where the production occurs that sustains the population, and that's where no-catch zones must be established and maintained.

The situation is directly analogous to investing. Any investor will tell you "never spend the principal". In a year when interest drops, the investor tightens his belt but doesn't spend the principal. In years with higher returns, the investor lives better but still returns some of the proceeds to the capital pool to cover inflation. Through discipline and sound principles, the investor lives better for having protected the income-generating capital.

Similarly, research shows that by protecting a core fish capital, no-catch marine reserves are extraordinarily effective at increasing the populations of fish sought by recreational and commercial anglers, not only inside the marine protected zones, but also outside of them as well through productivity spill-over. So here in South Florida, we have anglers upset because the scientists are acting as responsible managers of the resource they love in a way that will provide them and everybody with the most opportunity. Opposition to the plan is short-sighted and contrary to the long-term best interests of those complaining and to the rest of us who enjoy fish on our table as well as diving on a productive reef tract covered with big fishes.

As a biologist, public leader, and private citizen, my strong request is that everyone respects the expertise of the fisheries scientists, allow the Park Service to manage these waters using the best science available, and allow the citizens and environment the opportunity to benefit from the plan the scientists have proposed.

Philip Stoddard, PhD  
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Professor of Biological Sciences, Florida International University