November 4, 2014

Superintendent Brian Carlstrom
Biscayne National Park
National Park Service
9700 SW 328 St.
Homestead, FL 33033

Dear Superintendent Carlstrom:

We, the undersigned members of the National Parks Conservation Association Sun Coast Regional Council, are united in our support for the creation of a marine reserve within Biscayne National Park in order to protect its unique assemblage of marine biodiversity. We are committed to the conservation of the resources, landscapes, and recreational experiences of our national parks and strongly believe that the National Park Service must act now to preserve Biscayne's incredible underwater ecosystems.

Biscayne National Park is a national treasure and home to one of the largest barrier reefs in the world. It 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. In addition to its ecological value, the park is a significant economic driver, supporting a variety of economic and recreation activities, such as fishing, diving, snorkeling, and boating. According to a National Park Service report, nearly half a million visitors to Biscayne in 2013 spent over $29 million and sustained 374 jobs in the local area.[1] Unfortunately, Biscayne's resources have deteriorated in health over the last several decades and scientists warn that that status of some populations indicates "imminent resource collapse."[2] To ensure the long-term health of Biscayne, park managers should implement and enforce strong, effective, and feasible management policies.

The ability of marine reserves to protect and restore threatened coral reef ecosystems and fish populations around the world has been detailed by a substantial amount of research over the course of several decades. The Dry Tortugas marine reserves established in Dry Tortugas National Park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary have had substantial benefits in terms of protecting and restoring degraded resources. Research results documented increases in the size and abundance of many over-exploited species within the reserve areas[3] and spillover of

[1] Cullinane, T. C., Huber, C., & Koontz, L. *2013 National Park visitor spending effects: Economic contributions to local communities, states, and the nation.* 2014, Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2014/824, National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.
[2] Ault, J. S., Smith, S. G., Meester, G. A., Luo, J., & Bohnsack, J. A. *Site characterization for Biscayne National Park: Assessment of fisheries resources and habitats.* NOAA Technical Memorandum 2001 NMFS-SEFSC-468.
[3] Ault, J. S., Smith, S. G., Bohnsack, J. A., Luo, J., Zurcher, N., McClellan, D. B., Ziegler, T. A., Hallac, D. E., Patterson, M., Feeley, M. W., Ruttenberg, B. I., Hunt, J., Kimball, D., & Causey, B. *Assessing coral reef fish*

more and larger fish occurred outside of reserve boundaries.[4] Furthermore, an economic study 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.[5] Similar results are needed within Biscayne National Park in order to protect the park's failing resources.

It is the responsibility of the National Park Service to protect the resources of our national parks unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. If current practices within Biscayne National Park do not change, Biscayne's incredible underwater world will not be around for our children and grandchildren to discover. We strongly urge you to act now, with the establishment of a marine reserve informed by strong science, to fulfill your duty to the American people to protect the severely threatened, yet incredibly unique resources of Biscayne National Park.

If you have questions, please contact Caroline McLaughlin, Biscayne Program Analyst, cmclaughlin@NPCA.org.

Sincerely,

Irela Bagué

Paul Martin

Sara Fain

Bruce C. Matheson

Bruce Garrison

Olga Melin

Pam Garrison

JoAnn Tredennick

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populations and community changes in response to marine reserves in the Dry Tortugas, Florida, USA. Fisheries Research 144 (2013) 28-37.

[4]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.

[5] Jeffrey, C.F.G., V.R. Leeworthy, M.E. Monaco, G. Piniak, M. Fonseca (eds.), *An Integrated Biogeographic Assessment of Reef Fish Populations and Fisheries in Dry Tortugas: Effects of No-take Reserves*, Prepared by the NCCOS Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment Biogeography Branch, Silver Spring, MD, NOAA Technical Memorandum NOS NCCOS 111, 2012.