



**Michelle Robinson**  
**Board Member, Protect Key West and the Florida Keys, Inc.**  
**Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting**

**August 18, 2015**

Good Morning, Sanctuary Advisory Council Board Members – thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Michelle Robinson and I have been a resident of Tavernier for 11 years. Today I am speaking on behalf of Last Stand as a member of the board. Last Stand is a volunteer organization whose mission is to promote, preserve and protect the quality of life in Key West, the Florida Keys and their environs, with a particular emphasis on the natural environment.

On behalf of our membership, we would like to express our strong support for the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park to implement the fisheries management plan to conserve and restore the park's fisheries resources.

Within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, we have witnessed the positive impacts of no-take marine reserves to enhance and sustain regional coral reef fisheries at Dry Tortugas. Scientific study over the first 10 years of the reserve detected significant changes in population occupancy, density and abundance within management zones for a suite of exploited and non-target species. The same research observed decreases in density of exploited species below baseline levels in areas open to all fishing. Research in other areas of the world has shown that marine reserves can have positive effects, increasing density both inside and outside of the reserve areas. The science proves the importance of preserving specific key areas of habitat, so that both the fisheries and the community that is supported by the fishery can be sustainable well into the future.

Public input during the process to create the Biscayne National Park management plan was extensive. Marine scientists from universities, NOAA Fisheries and the National Park Service evaluated publicly proposed maps for potential marine reserves and ranked them according to the potential effectiveness of reaching zone goals. The final zone size, shape and location is based on this ranking and covers only 6% of park waters. Park visitors to Biscayne will still be able to fish recreationally in the majority of park waters with 63% of hard bottom areas outside of reserve boundaries. Boating, swimming, and diving will continue to be permitted within reserve boundaries.

Establishing a marine reserve will significantly increase the chances that future generations will be able to enjoy Biscayne National Park's rare combination of terrestrial, marine and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty. With that vision, 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.

Thank you for considering our comments.