

**Testimony of Bryan Boyd**

**Ocean Blue Yacht Sales**

**House Natural Resources and House Small Business Joint Field Hearing**

**August 3, 2015**

Chairman Bishop and members of the House Natural Resources and Small Business Committees:

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today and discuss the impact of proposed closures at Biscayne National Park for the recreational marine industry. My name is Bryan Boyd and I am the managing partner of Ocean Blue Yacht Sales. Our marine dealership has 3 locations in Florida: Port Canaveral, Stuart, and Lighthouse Point. We are the exclusive dealer for Tiara, Pursuit, Shearwater and Skeeter boat brands in south east Florida. I have owned this business for the past 6 years but have been in the recreational marine industry for over 33 years. Ocean Blue Yacht Sales has 24 employees and sells primarily fishing boats, with approximately 150 boats going through our inventory each year.

Recreational boating and the industry which supports it, is the lifeblood for many small businesses. According to statistics from the National Marine Manufacturers Association, there are over 870,000 registered boats, 5,500 boating related businesses employing over 55,000 jobs in Florida. The economic impact of the boating industry to the state of Florida exceeds \$10.3 billion annually. Nationally, recreational boating employs over 650,000 people in 35,000 marine businesses and contributes over \$121 billion in economic impact.

The businesses and jobs which support the recreational boating industry range from boat manufacturing plants to marinas to service and repair facilities to dealerships like ours. Boating is a popular sport in Florida. 82% of all boats sold in this state are powerboats, engaged in the type of leisure and recreational fishing that goes on in places such as Biscayne National Park.

The finalized general management plan for Biscayne National Park is deeply troubling. Biscayne is the nation's largest marine park and draws visitors from throughout Florida, the US and world. I strongly believe national parks should be maintained for the use and enjoyment of the American people. Management practices to preserve and protect the National Parks are valid endeavors. However, management plans must balance the interests of conservation with public access. The policies proposed in the finalized plan do not achieve this balance. This plan also fails to ignore the significant economic impact on the boating and angling businesses in our region.

The recreational boating and fishing industries have been engaged in the management process for Biscayne for quite some time. Initial proposals to close over 10,000 acres of the Park were met with heavy resistance. Even our own fisheries agency--FWC—is opposed to the marine reserve. For the past several years, FWC, stakeholders, and even elected officials pushed for a compromised management approach that would allow public access while also ensuring sustainable fisheries. Some access is better than no access at all. Marine reserves are one tool in

the fisheries management toolbox, but as I and other witnesses agree—should be used as a last resort. The Park Service has jumped over countless less restrictive management options—permits, seasonal closures, size and bag limits, quotas, and gear restrictions. Instead, they settled on the most drastic management policy available—complete closure.

The lure of selling sportfishing boats as we do, rests on the ability of boaters to use their vessel for actual sportfishing. Biscayne National Park is a popular destination for our customers and a drastic limit to boaters ability to fish in the park, will not only deter sales, but also impact the boating businesses that rely on sportfishing activities. The marine reserve encompasses nearly 40% of the reef track—such a significant loss of public access and the resulting economic impact cannot be ignored.

Clean water and healthy and sustainable fisheries are important to the marine industry. For every gallon of fuel purchased for marine engines—money goes right back to conservation efforts—a fund amounting to almost \$625 million annually. These efforts ensure boating access through ramps, rebuilding of marine habitat, and needed dredging to maintain navigable waterways. Boaters want, need, and contribute to water conservation—so to shut them out from the very resource they help protect is unfair and unwarranted.

Given the tremendous economic, social and conservation benefits provided by recreational fishing and boating, we can't allow bad policies to stall not only visitor access, but the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Floridians.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before the committee's today and welcome any further questions.