

News story: Marian Spain appointed interim Chief Executive of Natural England as James Cross steps down

James Cross is to step down as Natural England's Chief Executive today after four years.

Marian Spain, a current Board member of Natural England and the Chief Executive of Plantlife International, will take over as interim Chief Executive shortly. This appointment will provide leadership and continuity while the recruitment of a permanent successor is carried out.

James Cross said:

We are now entering a new phase for Natural England, as we look forward to a new Chair joining in January and begin preparations for the 2019 Spending Review. This follows a significant period of change, with the Countryside Stewardship/Environmental Stewardship transfer to the Rural Payments Agency on 1 October and the movement of a number of people through secondment and assignment processes.

I feel it is the right time to allow fresh leadership of the organisation to tackle these challenges and opportunities. We have achieved a lot together since I joined back in 2014. I'm particularly proud of the network of marine conservation zones, the England Coast Path and pioneering new ways to connect people with nature through care farms and nature-friendly schools.

I'm immensely proud of everyone I've worked alongside within Natural England. My personal highlights have been the many, many amazing site visits I've been lucky enough to experience, seeing first hand our brilliant people doing what they do best.

Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England who is due to retire in the New Year, said:

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to James for the leadership, drive and sheer hard work he has given to Natural England over the last four years.

He has been a key architect of important reforms to our organisation, enabling it to secure significant gains for the natural environment through efficiency, innovation and collaboration in a difficult financial climate.

James can take great pride in all he has achieved while Chief

Executive and I wish him well in the future.

Marian Spain was appointed interim Chief Executive by the Natural England Board. She has held a number of senior roles with organisations in the environment sector, including the Environment Agency and Countryside Agency – a predecessor body of Natural England.

Marian joined the Natural England Board in March this year but will relinquish this position while interim Chief Executive. She said:

I am delighted to be appointed to such an important role at a crucial time for Natural England and the environment as a whole. Natural England has a wealth of talented people passionate about making a difference for the natural world and I look forward to working with them.

Alan Law, Chief Officer for Strategy and Reform, has been appointed Deputy Chief Executive to support Marian.

Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England added:

I am delighted that Marian has agreed to become Natural England's interim Chief Executive, to provide leadership and continuity during an important time for the natural environment. Alan Law has demonstrated his conservation and leadership abilities during many years with Natural England and this new role will make even greater use of those talents.

As we leave the European Union, Natural England has a vital role to play in helping the government to find new ways of working with people to deliver the 25 Year Environment Plan and leave the natural world in a better state.

I am also very pleased to have persuaded Julie Lunt to stay on as Chief Officer for Legal and Governance until further notice. She had been due to leave at the end of the year. Her leadership and expertise will be invaluable to Natural England over the coming months.