

[News story: Natural England's chair announces retirement](#)

Natural England's chair Andrew Sells has announced his intention to retire in January 2019.

Andrew Sells has held the position of Natural England chair since January 2014 and during his tenure the organisation has demonstrated its vital role in promoting conservation and protecting biodiversity.

Natural England's chair Andrew Sells said:

It has been a huge privilege and pleasure to serve as the chair of Natural England and, thanks to the highly capable and committed staff, the organisation has changed for the better.

During my tenure, we have tried to work much more with people to achieve shared outcomes and moved closer to the people we work with through a devolved area structure; we have radically reformed our licensing activities; we have published our Conservation Strategy and have been instrumental in shaping the Government's 25 year Plan for the Environment; we have advised on 90 Marine Conservation Zones and we have made long strides towards completing a path around England's coast.

I would also like to thank the Secretary of State for leading the Government's commitment to improve the environment within a generation; and James Cross, our chief executive, for his drive, determination and tireless hard work to reform our organisation.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Natural England plays a vital role in safeguarding our natural environment as well as enabling people to access and enjoy it. Andrew Sells' energy and commitment have been exceptional and I am very grateful for all that he has delivered as chair.

Natural England's chief executive James Cross said:

I want to thank Andrew for all his hard work leading Natural England's dedicated staff and volunteers across the country. Natural England's great achievements over recent years are testament to Andrew's driving passion for reforming Natural England and protecting our environment.

The recruitment process for the new chair will commence shortly.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Natural England chair Andrew Sells' letter to Environment Secretary Michael Gove

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to let you know in good time that I intend to retire as chair of Natural England in January 2019 when I will have completed 5 years in the role. I have always believed that 5 years in any such job is long enough and I discussed this timing with the Appointments team at No.10 last summer. Also, as I approach yet another significant birthday it seems right to move on to new challenges as there are other things I wish to do in my life.

May I take the opportunity to say what a huge privilege, and pleasure, it has been to serve as Chair of Natural England. I have nothing but admiration for our highly capable and committed staff, and I have also been fortunate to have the constant support of a high calibre board. I am also grateful for the support I have had from Defra colleagues.

I would like to think that Natural England has changed for the better during my tenure: we have tried to work much more with people to achieve shared outcomes and moved closer to the people we work with through a devolved area structure; we are radically reforming our licensing activities; we have published our Conservation Strategy and have been instrumental in shaping the Government's 25 year Plan for the Environment (from first draft to last, quite literally); we have advised on 90 Marine Conservation Zones (unseen and unsung work but hugely important); we have made long strides towards completing a path around England's coast, and much more besides, although of course much remains to be done.

On a personal note, may I also say what a pleasure it has been to work with you as Secretary of State. If I may say so, from the day of your appointment the Department has felt like a different place; your hugely welcome commitment to the environment and to the work of Natural England is much appreciated. Indeed, the fact that the Prime Minister herself launched the Government's 25-year Plan for the Environment is testament to the Government's commitment to leave the environment in a better condition for the next generations. As we seek to reverse decades of decline I am encouraged that the Government's commitment to 'Net Gain' and Natural Capital (both policies urged by Natural England) have the potential to be transformative.

I will of course be happy to help in any way I can to ensure a smooth transition to my successor.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to our outstanding Chief Executive, James Cross: many of the reforms we have introduced would not have come to fruition without his drive and determination and I am most grateful to him and his senior team for their tireless hard work.

With every good wish,

Yours always,

Andrew Sells

Environment Secretary Michael Gove's response to Natural England chair Andrew Sells

We shall be very sorry to lose you as part of the Defra group leadership, and I am very grateful for all that Natural England has delivered under your chairmanship. As you rightly record, both on land and at sea, NE has played a vital role in safeguarding our natural environment and enabling people to access and enjoy it.

This has been a period when Natural England has undergone huge changes and delivered major new projects, including the England coastal path, and your energy and commitment has been exceptional.

I am very grateful for your thoughtfulness in giving us notice of your retirement, to enable a smooth succession.

I have asked my office to work with yours on the timing of the public announcement of your plans and we'll initiate the process of recruiting for your successor shortly so that we can have someone in post by January.