

Natural England Chief Executive to retire

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Marian Spain's retirement follows a career in environmental conservation and nature restoration spanning more than four decades

Marian Spain has today (Tuesday 17 March) confirmed her intention to retire as Chief Executive of Natural England.

It follows a tenure defined by significant advancements in the protection and restoration of the natural environment, in support of public health, food security and sustainable development. Natural England will shortly launch a recruitment campaign to appoint a new Chief Executive, with an anticipated leadership transition in autumn 2026. Marian will remain in post until a successor is formally appointed.

Appointed as Chief Executive in 2018, Marian has had a 40-year career in nature and environmental conservation in the public and third sectors. She has overseen a transformative period for Natural England, including the development and launch of its ambitious new strategy, Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security, which sets a clear and definitive course for nature recovery across the country.

As Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, Marian has been instrumental in the delivery of key nature recovery initiatives, most recently steering Natural England's work on developing the Nature Restoration Fund, the King's Series of National Nature Reserves and the rollout of the Landscape Recovery scheme. These landmark programmes continue to support landowners and communities in delivering large-scale, long-term habitat creation and restoration, while also enabling housing and infrastructure projects to play a stronger role in driving environmental recovery.

Her tenure also coincides with a historic milestone for public access to nature, as the King Charles III England Coast Path – the longest coastal path in the world – nears completion, leaving a lasting legacy for public health, wellbeing, and connection to the environment.

Reflecting on her retirement, Chief Executive, Marian Spain said:

It has been the privilege of my career to serve as Chief Executive of Natural England. I am immensely proud of what our dedicated teams have achieved together, from designating Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Landscapes and Marine Protected Areas; to embedding access to nature into the health service; from supporting new green infrastructure in our towns and cities, to enabling growth in offshore wind whilst restoring marine wildlife; from helping build new homes rich in nature, to advising farmers on how to harness nature to secure sustainable food production.

As we reach significant milestones for the Landscape Recovery Scheme, the Nature Restoration Fund, our National Nature Reserves and our National Trails, I step down knowing that the organisation is in a strong position to continue leading the change for nature's recovery and increasing access to nature for all. I want to thank all my colleagues and partners for their passion and support.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

Marian has been an exceptional leader for Natural England during a period of vital transition and unprecedented ambition for our natural environment. Her unwavering commitment, strategic vision and deep understanding of both the ecological and administrative complexities of nature recovery have been invaluable. We owe her a great debt of gratitude for her tireless service and the robust foundation she leaves behind.

Nature Minister Mary Creagh said:

Natural England's achievements over the past eight years reflect Marian's outstanding leadership. I want to thank her for her extraordinary dedication to championing nature - the foundation of our health, wellbeing and economy.

Under her stewardship, Natural England has become a driving force in delivering the government's ambitions - from the successful return of beavers to Britain's waterways to the new Nature Restoration Fund unblocking development while securing lasting improvements for nature. Her work has shown that a thriving natural environment and a growing economy can go hand in hand. I wish her all the best in her retirement and I look forward to working with Natural England to build on the strong foundations she has built.

Natural England plays a key role in delivering the government's environmental priorities. Its purpose is to help conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/natural-england-chief-executive-to-retire>