

# **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.

---

## **[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.

---

## **News story: Doctors and nurses to be taken out of Tier 2 visa cap**

As part of a long-term government plan for the NHS, more details of which will be set out in due course, doctors and nurses are to be excluded from the cap on skilled worker visas.

The move will mean there will be no restriction on the numbers of doctors and nurses who can be employed through the Tier 2 visa route – giving the ability to recruit more international doctors and nurses to provide outstanding patient care when required.

The Tier 2 visa route, which has had an annual cap of 20,700 since 2011, has in recent months seen the number of applications exceed the monthly allocation of available places.

This has been driven, in large part, by demand from the NHS, which accounts for around 40% of all Tier 2 places.

The change will be outlined in the Immigration Rules laid before Parliament today.

As well as providing a boost to the NHS, it will also free up hundreds of additional places a month within the cap for other highly skilled occupations, such as engineers, IT professionals and teachers.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I recognise the pressures faced by the NHS and other sectors in recent months. Doctors and nurses play a vital role in society and at this time we need more in the UK. That is why I have reviewed our skilled worker visa route.

This is about finding a solution to increased demand and to support our essential national services.

The exclusion of doctors and nurses from the cap comes as the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care puts in place long-term measures to increase the supply of domestic doctors – including increasing the number of training places.

Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Overseas staff have been a vital part of our NHS since its creation 70 years ago. Today's news sends a clear message to nurses and doctors from around the world that the NHS welcomes and values their skills and dedication. It's fantastic that patients will now benefit from the care of thousands more talented staff.

This builds on steps we have already taken to make sure the NHS has the staff it needs for the future – boosting training places for home-grown doctors and nurses by 25 per cent and giving over a million NHS employees a well-deserved pay rise.

The Tier 2 cap forms part of the government's approach to controlling net migration. It relates to certificates of sponsorship which are applied for by UK employers looking to bring in non-EU skilled workers.

Before December 2017, the cap, which was set on the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), had only been reached on one occasion. However, it has been reached every month since last December.

When the cap is reached, places are scored using a points-based system, with top priority given to jobs on the shortage occupation list. The shortage occupation list already includes a number of medical professions and no role that is part of this list has ever been refused.

---

**[Press release: Study points to new ways to reduce conflict in fragile states](#)**



The Stabilisation Unit visits Mosul in March 2018 to assess stabilisation requirements

The [Elite Bargains and Political Deals research](#) indicates that greater focus on the politics of conflicts, and those who control power and resources on the ground, is crucial to reducing violence.

The Minister for the Middle East and for International Development Alistair Burt said:

“This research report sets out to answer two of the most difficult questions in foreign policy today: How can we help reduce levels of violent conflict? And how do we deal with the often unsavoury groups and individuals that sustain them?

Today, thousands are suffering in seemingly intractable conflicts across the world. We must do what we can to reduce their plight and minimise the dangers that conflict and instability pose to our own national security.

We need to keep reviewing our approach in light of experience, and that is what this report seeks to do.”

The report is the result of 18 months of research by cross-government and independent academics and was launched on 14 June at Chatham House.

The study seeks to provide a more robust evidence base for the UK’s approach to stabilisation and to help policymakers provide more effective interventions in conflict contexts. Lessons from global conflicts, past and present, are identified in the report.

The Stabilisation Unit is an agile, cross-government unit that provides advice and expertise to prevent and de-escalate conflict and meet national security challenges in high-risk environments.

Follow Minister Burt on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](#)

For journalists, email [SUComms@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:SUComms@dfid.gov.uk)

Published 15 June 2018

Last updated 19 December 2018 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 19 December 2018 Link to Elite Bargains project page and press contact details updated.



## Press release: Low tax gap results in £71 billion for UK public services

The tax gap for 2016 to 2017 is 5.7%, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) confirmed today.

Had the tax gap remained at its 2005/06 level the UK would have lost £71 billion in revenue destined for public services.

The tax gap is the difference between the tax that should be paid to HMRC and the actual tax that has been paid. Keeping the tax gap consistently low is a result of HMRC's work to help customers get things right from the start, and the department's sustained efforts to tackle evasion and avoidance.

The tax gap trend shows a long-term decline – it has reduced from 7.3% in 2005 to 2006 to an estimated 5.7% in 2016 to 2017, or £33 billion. This is the same percentage tax gap as for 2015 to 2016, which has been revised down from last year's estimate of 6%.

Mel Stride, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

These really positive figures show that the tax gap is the lowest in the last 5 years, which reflects the hard work that HMRC and I have been doing to ensure we support businesses to pay the right tax at the right time and clamp down on tax evasion and avoidance.

Collecting taxes is essential for funding our vital public services such as the NHS – indeed, had the tax gap remained at its 2005/06 level the UK would have lost £71 billion in revenue destined for public services, enough to build 200 hospitals.

Key findings from the Measuring the Tax Gap publication include:

- small businesses made up the largest proportion of unpaid tax by customer group at £13.7 billion;
- taxpayer errors and failure to take reasonable care made up £9.2 billion of unpaid taxes by behaviour, while criminal attacks made up £5.4 billion;
- income Tax, National Insurance Contributions, and Capital Gains Tax made up the largest proportion of the tax gap by tax type at £7.9 billion for 2016 to 2017, equivalent to 16.4% of Self Assessment liabilities;
- the VAT gap showed a declining trend over time, falling from 12.5% in 2005 to 2006 to 8.9% in 2016 to 2017.

Jon Thompson, HMRC's Chief Executive, said:

The UK is the only country in the world to regularly publish their tax gap in detail and at 5.7%, it remains at its lowest for five years. I am pleased that the downward trend shows HMRC and HM Treasury's continued hard work to tackle evasion and avoidance is working.

HMRC is also working hard to help taxpayers get their tax right by offering support and investing in digital services to improve businesses' record keeping and reduce errors.

HMRC is working with small businesses to help them get their tax right first time around. The department aims to make sure the tax system is not a barrier to setting up, running and growing a business; which is why the department offers businesses support and provides information, to help businesses start up, sustain and grow.

HMRC is continuing to roll-out Making Tax Digital (MTD) for businesses. Once fully operational, MTD will help to reduce the tax gap by helping to prevent error and failure to take reasonable care. Digital record keeping combined with a modern, more automated tax system will help businesses get their affairs right the first time.

## Notes for Editors

1. Measuring the Tax Gap 2018 can be found [here](#)
2. Since 2010, HMRC has secured and protected over £175 billion in additional tax revenue as a result of actions to tackle tax evasion, tax avoidance, and non-compliance.
3. HMRC has been measuring the tax gap annually since 2005 to 2006.
4. HMRC is the only revenue authority in the world that measures and publishes the tax gap in this level of detail, covering both direct and indirect taxes, every year. It publishes the tax gap because the department believes it's important to be transparent in their work.
5. Follow HMRC's Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice
6. [HMRC's Flickr channel](#)