

Press release: New appointments to the Natural Capital Committee

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove has appointed two new members to the Natural Capital Committee.

Professors Melanie Austen and Chris Collins bring their expertise in marine conservation and soil health and are appointed for the remainder of the Committee's current term, through to December 2020.

Professor Austen said:

The Natural Capital Committee has been influential in advising government on the importance of natural capital on sustainable economic growth, health and wellbeing.

I feel honoured to have been invited to join the Committee and am particularly looking forward to adding a distinctly marine perspective, and considering how implementation of the 25 year Environment Plan could improve our natural marine environment and the sustainable benefits that we gain from it.

Professor Austen is a marine ecologist and interdisciplinary marine researcher who is a Head of Science for the Sea and Society group at Plymouth Marine Laboratory. She has recently been appointed as an independent member of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC); completed a three year term as the Chief Scientific Advisor to the UK's Marine Management Organisation (MMO); and for the last twenty years has been developing and leading UK and EU funded collaborative marine research projects, including currently GCRF Blue Communities in South East Asia.

Through her interdisciplinary research she has examined and quantified the societal consequences and policy relevance of changes to the marine environment and its ecosystems. She has been an Honorary Professor at the University of Exeter medical school since 2014, a member of other Expert Advisory Groups, and has chaired an EU Marine Board expert group on ecosystem valuation.

Professor Chris Collins is Chair of Environmental Chemistry at the University of Reading, where his research focuses on determining the factors controlling exposure of biota to environmental pollution to develop the evidence base for regulators.

He is the Natural Environment Research Council Soils Coordinator, overseeing a £10 million research investment to improve our understanding of how soils resist, recover and adapt to land use and climate change. Professor Collins chairs the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Hazardous Substances Advisory Committee providing expert advice to the UK Government on

how to protect the environment, and human health via the environment from chemicals.

Professor Collins said:

Soils have been a bit of a Cinderella topic when compared to air and water, so to restate the commitment to manage soils sustainably by 2030 in the 25 Year Environment Plan was a major step forward. Serving on the Committee will help to ensure we develop the approaches to deliver this aspiration.

Professor Dieter Helm, Chair of the Natural Capital Committee, commented:

Melanie and Chris bring world-leading expertise. They will strengthen the Committee's ability to support implementation of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan at a vital time for the protection and enhancement of our natural environment.

Other members of the Committee include Professors Ian Bateman, Diane Coyle, Paul Leinster, Colin Mayer and Kathy Willis. Dame Georgina Mace recently left the Committee to take up a position on the Adaptation Sub Committee of the Committee on Climate Change.