



The state of Natural England 2019-20

A special pay report by
Prospect trade union



prospect.org.uk
enquiries@prospect.org.uk

Protect England's nature – protect Natural England

Natural England: underfunded and underpaid – but needed more than ever

Natural England staff remain steadfast in protecting England's wildlife and habitats and deploying solutions to help reduce climate breakdown – this despite ongoing severe budget cuts and comparatively poor pay.

Prospect, the largest trade union in Natural England, highlighted the plight of the organisation and its staff in our widely circulated *State of Natural England 2018-19* report¹, and at our Parliamentary launch in March 2019.

Natural England, the public's guardian for England's natural environment, is still in crisis. Its workforce continues to shrink, central government funding is at its lowest level since it was formed in 2007 and its staff are suffering their ninth year of damaging pay restraint, all with no sign of improving.

¹ <https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2019/00125>

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Why should we worry?

The global climate strike in 2019, which included many of our students and younger people, and the Extinction Rebellion movement, showed that many people are concerned about climate change.

In a poll by Ipsos MORI in August 2019, 85% of the population expressed concern about climate change².

Biodiversity decline

England is renowned for its 'green and pleasant land'. But England is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

The State of Nature 2019 report³ revealed a devastating loss of wildlife in the UK over the past 40 years, with more than one in seven wildlife species becoming extinct or threatened with extinction. The UK ranks 189 out of 218 countries assessed for loss in biodiversity.

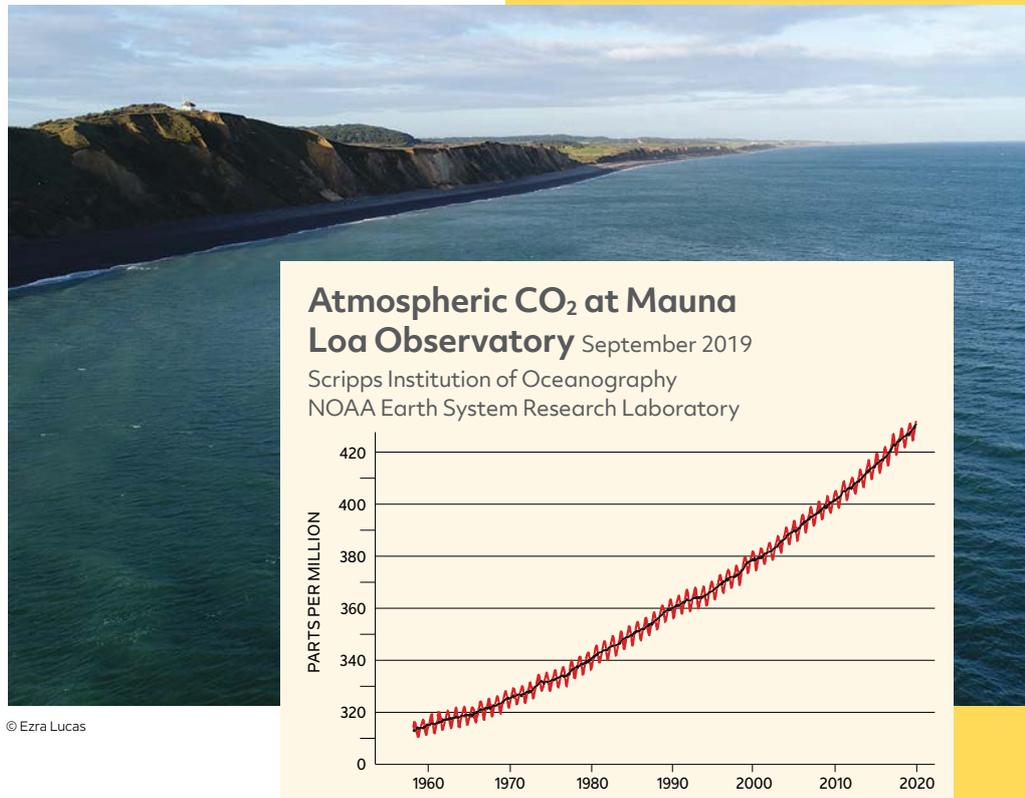
This terrible loss, which is set to continue, has been brought about by:

- policy-supported intensive agriculture
- over-consumption and production of waste
- climate change impacts
- non-native invasive species, and
- land use changes including deforestation and urbanisation.

Climate breakdown

In 2018, the United Nations warned the global community that we have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe.

Over a year ago, the IPCC *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C*⁴ warned that urgent changes were needed to cut the risk of extreme heat, drought, floods and poverty.



But we are far from making these improvements.

The overall levels of CO₂ released is increasing year on year. The richest 10% are responsible for 50% of carbon emissions and the poorest 50% responsible for less than 10%. We need to reach 350 parts per million to get back towards safe levels of CO₂.

The benefits of strong early action on climate change far outweigh the cost of delayed action or not acting.

If the global community finds a way to limit global warming to 1.5°C, compared with 2°C, several hundred million people could be saved from being exposed to climate-related risks and susceptible to climate-related poverty by 2050.

The benefits of strong early action on climate change far outweigh the cost of delayed action or not acting

² Hayhow DB et al (2019) State of Nature report. State of nature partnership <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019>

³ <http://bit.ly/ipsos-climate>

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15>

Natural England could do so much more for our wildlife, our communities and our fight against climate breakdown if it was properly supported.

What Natural England can do about it

Against all of these pressures, Natural England has sought to push back and mitigate the damage. Examples include:

- delivering habitat creation and enhancement projects that help combat climate change and species decline, such as this lowland raised bog restoration in Cumbria that serves as an important carbon sink and supports a myriad of important species
- species reintroduction programmes across the country which are helping to reverse some of the consequences of man-made biodiversity decline, eg the introduction of beavers, red kites and fen raft spiders
- working with developers, local authorities and other public organisations to secure new public open space and green infrastructure and protect and restore our fragile marine environment – helping species adapt to climate change and benefiting local communities' well being
- helping communities visit and learn about our special countryside at our National Nature Reserves.

Natural England also has a crucial regulatory role of ensuring that development is sustainable on land and at sea – including pioneering a way for developers to provide biodiversity net gain.

Natural England can do this because it is a repository of skill, expertise, enthusiasm and commitment to the natural world. Some staff have been working in this area since the 1980s.

We remain the obvious force to realise the aims of the government's 25-year Environment Plan and the emerging environment bill and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

With continuing decline in core funding, Natural England's capability to deliver these important measures will only reduce – just at a time when we need so much more concerted effort. We need government and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to recognise Natural England's crucial role in recovering nature in England.

Bolton Fell Moss peat conservation site – Deborah Land, Natural England lead conservation advisor and senior reserve manager, Cumbria area team



How is Natural England's staff faring?

Natural England's pay system continues to suffer its own "perfect storm" – dragging along the bottom of the salary starting points for the entire Defra family group.

The Treasury's below-inflation cap on pay for many years has made a bad situation even worse and resulted in a broken pay system.

Progression for staff through their grades has all but stopped, and they are doubly hit by a real-terms loss of monthly take-home pay and a hit on their future pensions.

Many of our members are enduring serious financial hardship, with some having to take on extra jobs to make ends meet. They are also having to forego the small luxuries in life such as family trips to the cinema or summer holidays.

Pay restraint is also widening the equal pay gap, with growing evidence of men being paid more than women for doing the same job across the grades.

Pay restraint has hurt the business too – Natural England is struggling to recruit and retain staff and has recently had to run a voluntary redundancy scheme to reduce the workforce further. This has led to a loss of crucial skills, experience and expertise – and ultimately risking its ability to do its job.

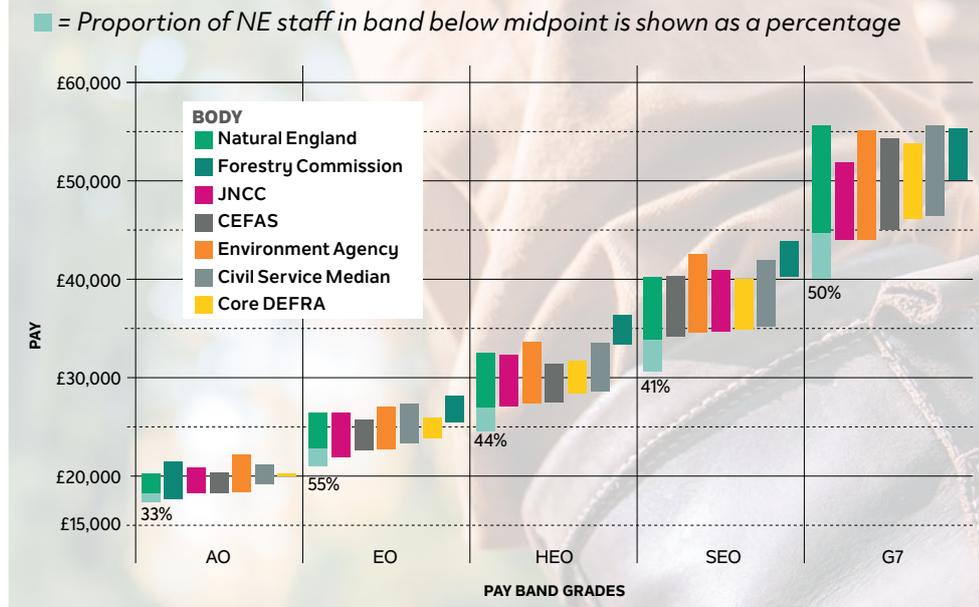
The graph above clearly shows Natural England consistently at the bottom for pay minima within the Defra group.

We also have unusually long pay scales in comparison (which the 2018-19 award will further exacerbate).

Key issues when comparing NE with Defra group include:

- the midpoint of the HEO and SEO grades in Natural England are below the starting salary of the other DEFRA organisations
- 55% of our EO grade advisors are below the pay midpoint
- overall, some 45% of the Natural England workforce are in the lowest grade band – the lowest of the low

Natural England pay ranges v other Defra agencies



Data based on 2017 Defra pay awards

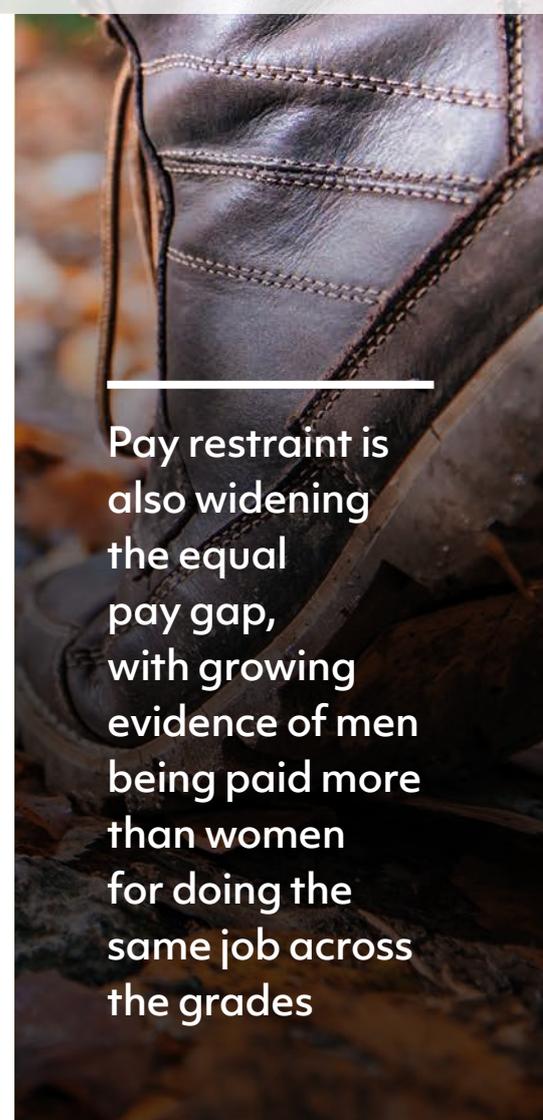
- currently, there is seemingly no hope of approaching the pay "target rate" let alone the "higher performance ceiling"
- between 2014 and 2019, the gap between core Defra and Natural England grade minima in cash terms has increased across all grades.

What pay austerity really means

The table overleaf tracks the real depression of pay when set against the expected increases as described by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), all against a pre-austerity baseline of 2009.

This not only hits people's pay packets but also affects pension provision for later life, carrying the legacy of austerity far beyond the point at which it will have ceased.

The trajectory graph on page 6 compares the change in real pay for people who were at the grade minimum in Natural England in 2010.

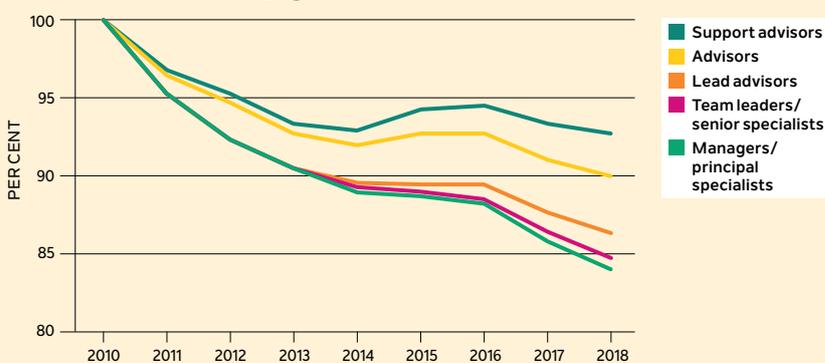


Pay restraint is also widening the equal pay gap, with growing evidence of men being paid more than women for doing the same job across the grades



Natural England staff pay group		Minimum	Mid-point	Target Rate	Higher Performance Ceiling
Grade 6 and 7 Managers Principal Specialists Delivery Managers	2009 base	£38,500	£44,117	£49,735	£55,550
	ONS rise	£52,462	£60,116	£67,771	£75,695
	Actual	£41,259	£46,247	£51,235	£57,222
	Deficit	-£11,203	-£13,869	-£16,536	-£18,473
SEO Team Leaders, Senior Specialists Delivery Leaders	2009 base	£29,250	£33,402	£37,555	£40,150
	ONS rise	£39,857	£45,515	£51,174	£54,710
	Actual	£31,493	£35,091	£38,689	£41,361
	Deficit	-£8,364	-£10,424	-£12,485	-£13,349
HEO Lead Advisors Group Co-ordinators	2009 base	£23,300	£26,418	£29,536	£32,420
	ONS rise	£31,750	£35,998	£40,247	£44,177
	Actual	£25,215	£27,821	£30,427	£33,399
	Deficit	-£6,535	-£8,177	-£9,820	-£10,778
EO Advisors	2009 base	£19,200	£22,247	£25,020	£26,360
	ONS rise	£26,163	£30,315	£34,093	£35,919
	Actual	£21,522	£23,649	£25,776	£27,153
	Deficit	-£4,641	-£6,666	-£8,317	-£8,766
AO Support Advisors	2009 base	£15,000	£17,142	£19,285	£19,700
	ONS rise	£20,440	£23,359	£26,279	£26,844
	Actual	£17,863	£19,045	£20,227	£20,798
	Deficit	-£2,577	-£4,314	-£6,052	-£6,046

Trajectory of real pay for new starter in 2010 by grade



The analysis assumes consistent satisfactory performance and does not include additional non-consolidated lump sum payments.

- for staff in the lowest grade (support advisors, AO), the loss of real pay up to 2018 is relatively smaller (down 7%); this reflects the trade unions pressing for differential uplift to protect the lowest paid
- the top two grades (G6/7, SEO) have experienced significant real loss of 15% and 16% respectively

- if you were a support advisor in 2010 at the grade minimum, you would have made it above the midpoint, and fairly close to the target rate; but the equivalent person in any other grade would still be below the midpoint (partly because of the short range of the lower grade, but the weighting of the pay deals is a big factor too).

While setting the declines in salaries against a benchmark index of 100 in 2010 is fine, the real declines in take-home cash are more stark.

How the 2% pay award affects staff and their families

The latest pay award in Natural England (2018/19) provided a flat 2% consolidated increase to all staff. Although this is the largest increase we have had for years, it has still resulted in paltry increases to staff's weekly take home pay, ranging roughly between £6–15 a week across the grades (after tax).

“ I receive an extra £11.04 a week following the pay rise! In addition to my full-time job as a lead adviser with Natural England, I work 22 hours a week in a restaurant to support my family of four. My husband is a farmer so what is earned is ploughed straight back into the farm, so his income is limited. Having to work 60ish hours a week obviously has a huge impact on my young children and family time, but as of October 2018 we just couldn't carry on with my NE wage alone.”

“ As a full-time S grade, my Natural England pay rise this year amounts to an extra £10.29 a week. There are four of us in our household, including two primary age children. I have also just started a secondment with Defra, which in the end I felt I had to do in order to try to keep up with the cost of living – so I'm now on Defra's band minimum for the grade, which is £2,000 more than my salary at NE (after over 10 years at the very same grade)! This has given me £42 more a week than I would have got had I stayed in NE.

I think it is highly likely I will end up staying in Defra permanently if I can find a permanent position there, because I can no longer afford to keep working in NE – unless it sorts out this pay situation in which case I will gladly come back. I regret this deeply, I have been a loyal, consistently well-performing employee for 18 years and I don't really want to leave. I also find it pretty appalling that my tiny pay rise is actually quite big in comparison with colleagues at lower grades.”

“ I get an extra £10.40 a week and this is only because I am on temporary promotion as an S Grade and only work 30 hours a week, so if I was on my substantial grade it would be even worse. I have 19 years' experience working in NE and I am the main bread winner since my husband lost his job and took over the caring duties for our disabled daughter. What can £10.40 a week help with? Well... how about the cost of a taxi one way to get into town from our village. This is what our daughter has to pay when no one else is around to take her.”

“ I am a part-time lead adviser, working 26 hours a week. The 2% pay rise has given me roughly £7.69 extra a week, to cover two adults, a one year old, a three year old and a dog. To put that in context, that covers just less than 40 minutes of my children's nursery costs a week.”

“ I work as an adviser, having started with the Countryside Agency in January 2001. It has taken 15 years to get to the target rate, which was only achieved thanks to the unions. The latest 2% award has given me an extra £8.42 a week (£6.50 after deductions). I have a wife with a minimum wage part-time job and a 17 year-old daughter looking to go to university next year. How far will my increase go? Well, Council Tax went up in April by £7 a month, water by £2 and energy by £11, that's a grand total of £20 a month extra cost before I leave the house... Also, the 'employee benefits' we have are worthless if you can't afford to buy the stuff we get discounts on!”

Cromer
Shoal Chalk
Beds Marine
Conservation
Zone

© Sam Bean

“The 2% pay rise has given me roughly £7.69 extra per week, to cover two adults, a one year old, a three year old and a dog.”

“NE and Defra need to make the case for us to bring back grade progression and parity with other Government bodies doing a similar job.”

“ I am an S grade and I work four days a week. The 2% increase has given me an extra £10.70 a week. My husband and I both work and our salaries support a mortgage and two children, one of whom is still full price at nursery. Nursery fees are increasing in January, as are train fares, so this increase will quickly be swallowed up.”

“ As a senior specialist, the 2% rise gives me approximately £12 a week. I'm in a two-person household, both in public sector employment at present but the poor progression in recent years is going to affect our pensions as we are due to retire in the next few years (probably before any improvement in pay levels), so I'm seriously thinking about hanging on for longer.”

“ I'm an adviser and have an extra £9.56 a week. This covers only me having to run a house and a car on a single salary of £23,379 (after the 2% increase), and almost 10 years' service. I also have ageing parents (in their early 70s), and I don't know how my salary will pay for any elderly care they may require.”

“ My take-home weekly increase as an S-level team leader following the pay rise is £9.85. Two adults and two very hungry teenage boys depend on my salary. Having been in post for just over ten years, consistently achieving Box 1 and 2 performance ratings each year, I am still earning below the mid-point for my grade... NE and Defra need to make the case to bring back grade progression and parity with other government bodies doing a similar job.”

How do we fix this?

We urgently need an evaluation to set a fair and decent rate for the job in Natural England, based on the skill sets, levels of responsibility and comparable pay landscape.

This could form part of the wider settlement from government to better achieve the urgent tasks facing England's environment.

We need a decent, multi-year organisational settlement that addresses pay through:

- a new benchmarked pay matrix with a revised number of pay scales and pay scale length, compared with the EFRA group and the private sector
- a mechanism for progress through a grade which could be based on professional development; this would stop people being trapped in the lower pay zones and enable specialists to advance.

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