

Sir

Natural England came into being yesterday (October 1) as an amalgam of the Government's wildlife watchdog English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency. Its creation is welcome and constitutes the biggest shake-up in conservation in England since World War II.

The new body faces many demanding tasks, not least tackling threats to Sites of Special Scientific Interest, reversing declines of wildlife and preventing damage to our environment. It will need to ensure an economically viable countryside, promote greater access to the natural world and help establish a network of protected areas in British seas as part of a Marine Act, which conservation groups are working hard to achieve.

Equally important will be its responsibility for the management of the countryside through schemes that reward farmers for encouraging wildlife, reducing water pollution and enhancing landscapes and public access. Last year's EU budget, brokered by the UK, jeopardises funding for these schemes.

It is time to better protect and restore our countryside, urban greenspaces and seas for the benefit of both people and wildlife. This will not be achieved unless the Government commits adequate funding over the long term.

Yours faithfully

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