

THE AUSTRALIAN

Peter Ridd loses High Court appeal over sacking

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Physicist Peter Ridd has lost his appeal to the High Court over his sacking by James Cook University, in what was seen as a test of academic freedom in Australia.

The court ruled against the Townsville-based academic who was sacked by James Cook University in 2018 for breaching its code of conduct over [critical comments he made](#) about the work of a leading coral scientist and the trustworthiness of research bodies such as the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

The decision comes as every university in the country [adopted a robust framework to protect freedom of speech among academics](#), ending a two-year Morrison government push to introduce a model code for the higher education sector.

As of this month, all 41 universities in Australia have either fully implemented the model code for academic free speech – designed by former chief justice Robert French in 2019 – or created pro-free speech policies that completely align with the code.

Professor Ridd was sacked by James Cook University for criticism of colleagues and their research into climate change and the Great Barrier Reef.

Education Minister Alan Tudge – who previously threatened to make the model code law if universities did not implement it – said on Tuesday the successful implementation of the code would help to ensure opposing viewpoints flourish on campus.

“If universities are not places for free, robust speech, then their very purpose is jeopardised. You cannot advance knowledge without challenging existing orthodoxies, and risk causing offence in the process,” Mr Tudge said.

“Freedom of expression is the most fundamental foundational principle of a university. Academics who don’t believe in free speech, or cannot handle someone challenging their work, should not be at a university.

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