

THE AUSTRALIAN

Fears uni may sack marine scientist over comments on reef health

James Cook University marine scientist Peter Ridd.
Picture: Cameron Laird

GRAHAM LLOYD THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM August 26, 2017

Outspoken marine scientist Peter Ridd has landed in hot water with James Cook University following a high-profile book tour in which he questioned the quality of Great Barrier Reef science.

Professor Ridd is understood to be under investigation for “serious misconduct” and colleagues fear he could be sacked. In a statement, JCU said “at this stage, the university cannot comment”.

Professor Ridd said he could not discuss whether a formal investigation was under way.

He was censured by JCU last June for “failing to act in a collegial way and in the academic spirit of the institution”.

His crime was to encourage the media to question two leading reef institutions, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, on whether they knew that photos they had published and claimed to show the long-term collapse of reef health could be misleading and wrong.

Professor Ridd was disciplined for breaching Principle 1 of JCU’s code of conduct by “not displaying responsibility in respecting the reputations of other colleagues”. He was told that if he did it again, he might be found guilty of serious misconduct.

No details are available of the investigation, which is understood to have started earlier this week.

Professor Ridd has given a series of high-profile media interviews over the past several weeks, including to Sky News’s Alan Jones and Peta Credlin, to promote a new Institute of Public Affairs book on climate change. He wrote the opening chapter, in which he argued there was perhaps no ecosystem on Earth better able to cope with rising temperatures than the Great Barrier Reef.

“Irrespective of one’s views about the role of carbon dioxide in warming the climate, it is remarkable that the Great Barrier Reef has become the ecosystem, more than almost all others, that is used to illustrate and claim environmental disaster from the modest warming we have seen over the course of the last century,” he wrote.

Professor Ridd has argued passionately for a better system of quality assurance to check scientific findings on which big public spending is based. “The fundamental problem is that we can no longer rely on ‘the science’ or, for that matter, our major scientific institutions,” he said.



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