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Delingpole Press Council ruling shows threat to free speech

The Australian Press Council's ruling against an article by journalist James Delingpole is yet another example of why the APC cannot be trusted with statutory powers, says John Roskam, executive director of the free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.

"The Press Council thinks they should decide what is allowed to be written about climate change or any controversial topic. But in a free society journalists and newspapers should be able to publish whatever they want on any topic of public debate," says John Roskam.

The APC today declared that it was unacceptable to compare renewable energy to a Ponzi scheme, and that journalists should not be allowed to quote people who equate others with pedophiles. According to the APC "the level of offensiveness is so high that it outweighs the very strong public interest in freedom of speech." It follows a decision last week where the APC dictated to Andrew Bolt what he is allowed to write about climate change.

"This is extraordinary on two levels. Firstly, there should never be an 'offensiveness' test for freedom of speech. Freedom of speech means nothing at all if it doesn't allow for discussion that some people find offensive. Secondly, only this week the ABC declared there is nothing wrong with equating climate sceptics to pedophiles. This is a clear case of double standards depending on which side of the climate debate you are on," says Mr Roskam.

Many in the Gillard government are believed to favour giving the Australian Press Council statutory powers and government funding as part of their response to the Finkelstein and Convergence reviews.

"This ruling is yet another piece of evidence in the mounting pile which shows why the Press Council cannot be trusted with statutory powers. Already the APC tries to dictate what Australians can read and hear – imagine how much further they would go if they were given the legislative 'teeth' they have been lobbying for," says John Roskam.

James Delingpole's article was published in *The Australian* on 3 May 2012 as part of his tour of Australia, sponsored by the Institute of Public Affairs.

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