

Obituary

Peter Kevin Ades

The University of Melbourne's School of Agriculture, Food and Ecosystem Sciences note with sadness the passing of Dr Peter Ades on Friday, 31st July 2026.

Peter was a valued member of the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture Science and Institute of Land and Food Resources, as well as the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences. After retirement in 2020, he continued his collaborations with the University of Melbourne as an Honorary Senior Fellow, involved in co-supervising PhD students.

Peter grew up in North Coburg and attended Ivanhoe Grammar. He completed a Bachelor of Forest Science at the University of Melbourne in 1977. He then worked for the Forestry Commission of New South Wales until 1991. During his time there, he was given release to complete a PhD at North Carolina State University. Peter then took up a full-time position at the University of Melbourne. During his time there he did several overseas sabbaticals at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Imperial College in London.

Peter's discipline was in forest genetics and tree breeding, and he taught breeding, biometrics and experimental design to countless undergraduate and postgraduate students over the decades. In addition to this, he provided a generation of science and forest science undergraduates with foundational knowledge of forest silviculture and management. For more than 20 years Peter was an integral part of the University's Forest Molecular Biology and Genetics research team where together with his colleagues he was instrumental in pushing the boundaries of what was possible with marker aided selection in forest tree breeding in particular in *Pinus radiata*. With a passion for forestry, tree breeding and plant pathology he also was uniquely qualified for the team's research to better understand Myrtle rust resistance in eucalypts, a recently introduced pathogen which posed significant risks to native flora, plantations and timber exports.

In 2011, Peter, together with Head of School Gerd Bossinger, Chris Weston and Zoology's Tim Dempster, was part of a small University team that traveled to the Tiwi Islands on a fact finding mission ahead of the establishment of a much lauded formal relationship between the Tiwi and the University aiming to support the Islander's efforts to establish a eucalypt-based plantation forestry operation.

In recent years Peter was an important part of the Plant Pathology group, being involved in student supervision and supporting students with data analysis and publications. Throughout his career, Peter mentored many research students who have gone on to careers in academia, at Agriculture Victoria, and in the biosecurity sector.

Many of Peter's former colleagues remember Peter as an academic with high standards and integrity. Former Dean Prof Lindsay Falvey noted "Another passing of the old guard. Peter worried about the big dilution in average quality across the faculty when we brought in the colleges, and his voice prompted the plan to help many VCAH staff to move to other careers and our plan for early closure of two colleges. One hopes that SAFES has voices like Peter's today." Similarly, from Prof Adrian Egan "As Associate Dean Research I had a lot of discussions with Peter particularly regarding VCAH staff identified as potential researchers as partial integration proceeded." Prof Bill Malcolm recalls "Peter was a committed part of us and the School since the 1990s, always fighting to keep up standards, good company and admirable in so many ways". From Prof Cousens, former Head of School "As well as his broad range of interests, Peter cared deeply about standards and principles. A wonderful colleague." From Prof Frank Dunshea "Peter was a man of high academic standards helping to keep us honest." Prof Snow Barlow "I always found Peter a delight the role of a thoughtful values and standards guided academic". From Prof Mark Burgman, "Peter and I started on the same day. I met him in Prof. Ferguson's office and I recall thinking this guy is very smart. He proved to be unfailingly kind, generous and yes, very smart. He was forgiving of the foibles of his colleagues, especially mine. He had encyclopaedic knowledge of history, politics, and environmental science generally. His love of plants was unparalleled; his roses, his glasshouse at home in the hills, and his orchard. For all that, I've never seen him happier than when he met Trevor. We'll miss him badly." From Prof Paul Taylor "I had known Peter for many years as a colleague and friend where we would often have lunch together at University House and enjoy discussing research and the politics of the world. Peter was a remarkable academic and had strong scientific ethics, and we collaborated on many PhD student's projects and papers". Prof Gerd Bossinger wrote "Peter was a great friend and supporter who I admired for his dry humor and razor-sharp wit. I did often seek his counsel and his unapologetic assessment in particular in relation to University politics was usually right on point. From Prof Barbara Howlett

“Peter and I were friends and published several papers together. I particularly enjoyed his sense of humour and our discussions about politics and the world in general, usually during lunch at University House”.

The most heart-warming memories are from the many students that Peter mentored and supervised. Dr Niloofar Vaghefi commented “Having taught me during my Master’s in 2009 and guided me through my PhD, his passing is a profound personal loss. Generous with his time and rigorous in everything he did, Peter brought immense kindness to our team. He will be deeply missed”. Dr Dilani de Silva remarked “It came so many memories to my mind, back in the days at Melbourne University. Peter was always helpful and provided a lot of guidance during my PhD. He was a great academic and I always admired his knowledge and views on analysis and interpretation of data.” Dr Azin Moslemi “An absolute unfortunate loss of a great teacher, friend and an exceptional biostatistician far too soon, I was actually thinking about him a couple of weeks ago when I ran SAS to statistically analyse the results from our project. It made me realise that I still rely on the skills he taught me all those years ago. His teaching has had a lasting impact on my work, and I will always be grateful for that.” From Dr Jiang Chang “Peter was very much involved in my PhD journey. He took part in many of my review discussions, and his insights were always thoughtful and helpful. In particular, he guided me through the microsatellite data analysis. His patient explanations and practical advice made a real difference to my work, and his kindness and approachability left a lasting impression on me. Though I am now based in Shanghai and cannot be there in person, I hold onto my own memories of Peter with deep gratitude. He made a real difference to my work, and I will always remember his kindness and patience.”. Throughout his years at the University, Peter made many long-term friendships; friendships that lasted throughout his life. Peter had a sharp and sometime dark wit and will always be remembered by his colleagues for his kindness and integrity.

Peter is survived by his partner Trevor, brother Colin, sister Sandra and mother. We, his colleagues and friends who shared many productive years with him, join together in offering our condolences to his family. Peter’s impact on forestry, education and research, and the lives of those he touched will never be forgotten.

