

Wednesday, 12 August 2026

Dr Leonid Schneider
Independent Science Journalist

By email: leonid.schneider@gmail.com

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL: TO BE OPENED BY ADDRESSEE ONLY

Dear Dr Schneider,

RE: Outcome of Preliminary Assessment

A preliminary assessment into the research related complaints raised by yourself was conducted in accordance with our [‘Responsible Conduct of Research: Procedure for Investigating Code Breaches’](#) (**‘Procedure’**) and has now concluded. The Assessment Officer (**‘AO’**) assigned to this matter has delivered their report to me as the Designated Officer (**‘DO’**) for consideration. I have considered the report and in accordance with paragraph 8.6 of the Procedures, I now provide you with the outcomes of the preliminary assessment and my decision.

The Concern	On 11 November 2025, the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity was included in correspondence between Leonid Schneider (‘the Complainant’) and Professor Chrishan Samuel (‘the Respondent’) regarding allegations of data falsification and data misrepresentation across 11 articles co-authored by the Respondent. The Monash Research Integrity Office (‘RIO’) noted that of the 11 articles highlighted by the Complainant on PubPeer, Articles 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 had the Respondent either attributed to the University of Melbourne, or the Respondent had conducted the work discussed in the Article, whilst a researcher of University of Melbourne. Accordingly, these articles were referred to University of Melbourne’s Research Integrity Office for their management. Monash University’s assessment therefore focused on the remaining articles: • Article 5: <i>‘Combining mesenchymal stem cells with serelaxin provides enhanced renoprotection against 1K/DOCA/salt-induced hypertension’</i> – British Journal of Pharmacology (‘Article 5’) • Article 6: <i>‘The renoprotective efficacy and safety of genetically-engineered human bone marrow-derived mesenchymal stromal cells expressing anti-fibrotic cargo’</i> – Stem Cell Research (‘Article 6’) • Article 7: <i>‘Simultaneous late-gadolinium enhancement and T1 mapping of fibrosis and a novel cell-based combination therapy in hypertensive mice’</i> – Biomedicine & Pharmacotherapy (‘Article 7’) • Article 9: <i>‘Mechanistic insights into the contribution of epithelial damage to airway remodelling. Novel therapeutic targets for asthma’</i> – American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology (‘Article 9’) • Article 10: <i>‘Relaxin requires the angiotensin II type 2 receptor to abrogate renal interstitial fibrosis’</i> – Kidney International (‘Article 10’) • Article 11: <i>‘AT1R-AT2R-RXFP1 Functional crosstalk in myofibroblasts: Impact on the therapeutic targeting of renal and cardiac fibrosis’</i> – Journal of American Society of Nephrology (‘Article 11’) The data falsification and data misrepresentation allegations made by the Complainant with respect to each were as follows: Article 5 (a) Two histological stains at Figure 5a depicted as representing different stains from different treatment groups, appear to be the same image focused at a different point
---------------------------	---

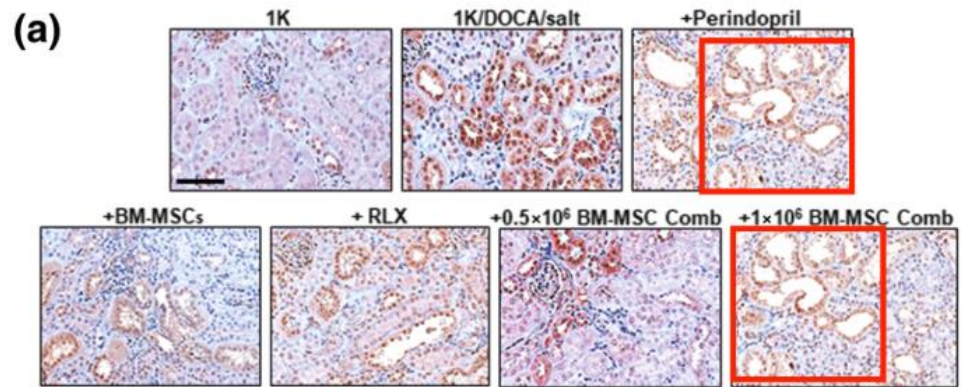


Figure 5a taken from <https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrisan+S.+Samuel%22>

(b) Two histological stains at Figure 5b depicted as representing different stains from different treatments groups appear to be the same image inverted

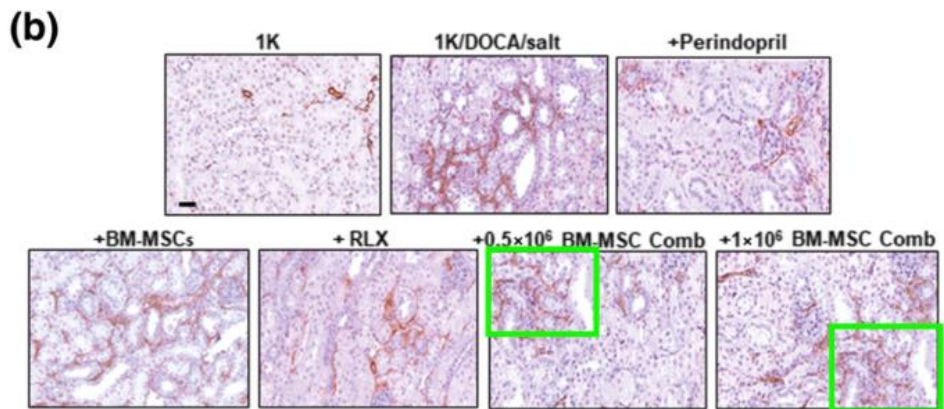


Figure 5b taken from <https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrisan+S.+Samuel%22>

Article 6

Different fluorescence microscopy images at Figures 3b depicted as being from different mice appear to be the same image, rotated

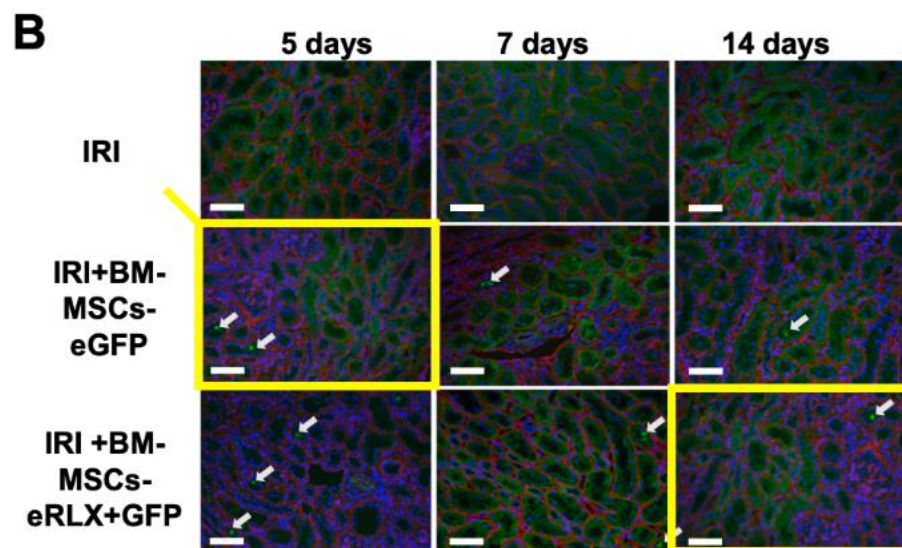


Figure 3b taken from <https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22>

Article 7

Two histological stains at Figures 2a depicted as representing different stains from different treatment groups appear to be the same image, rotated

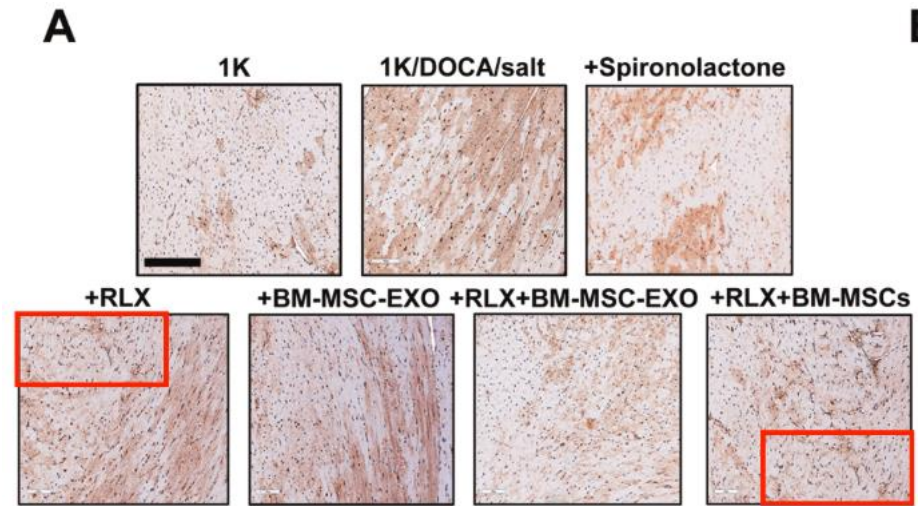


Figure 2a taken from <https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22>

Article 9

The Coomassie blue stained bands at lanes 2-5 of the western blot shown at Figure 6D, appear to be the mirror image of lanes 8-11 in Figure 6D

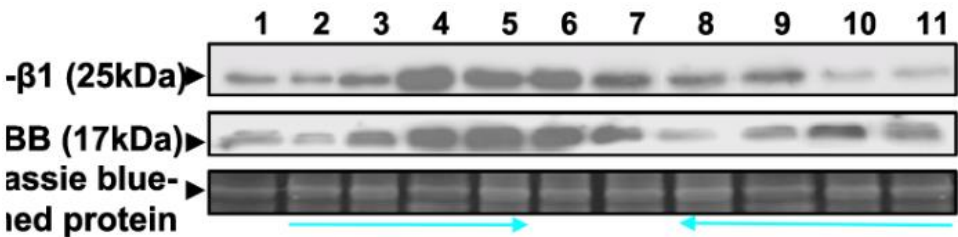
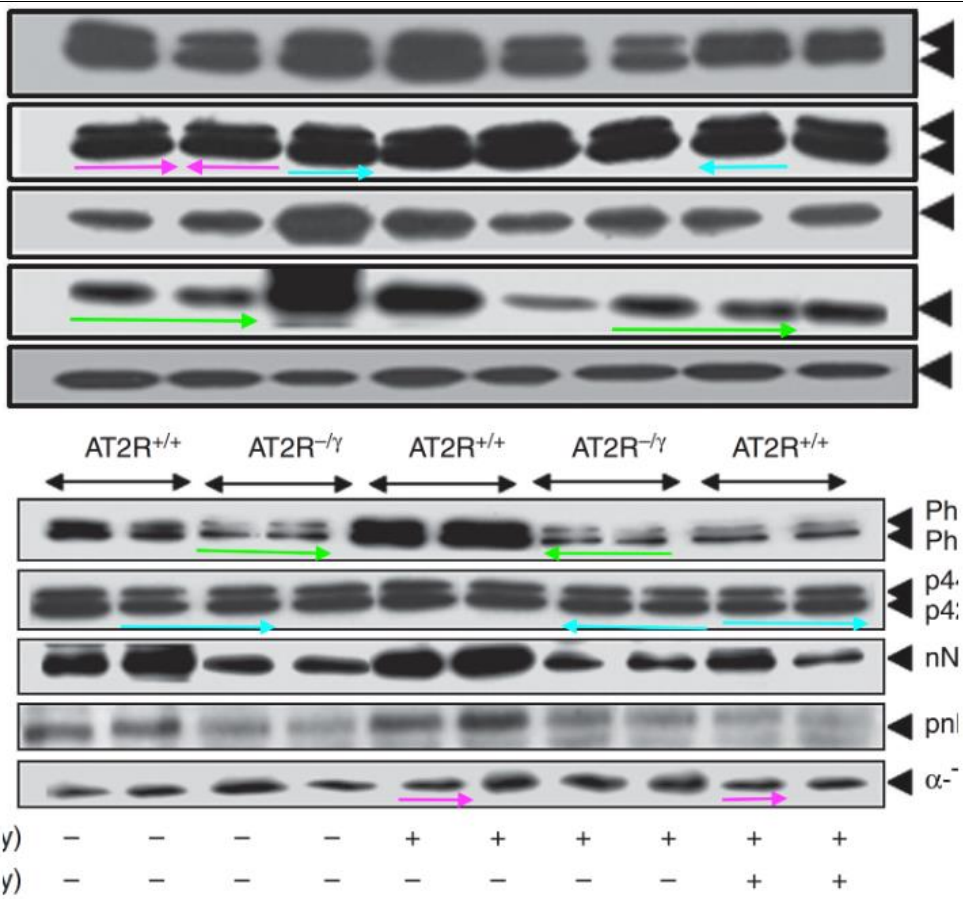
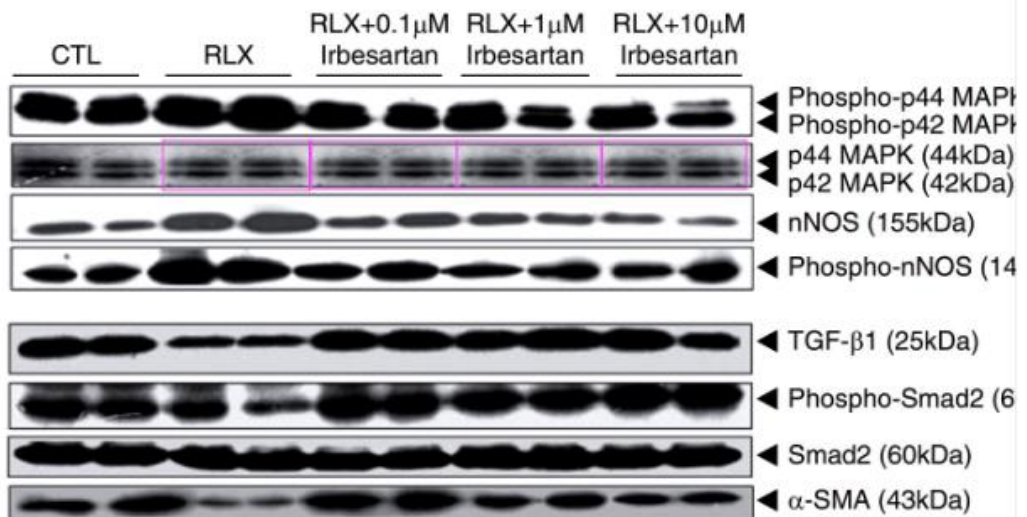


Figure 6D taken from <https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22>

Article 10

The western blots featured at Figure 1a and 3a appear to have similar looking bands in the same direction, or in a mirrored direction despite being depicted as different samples

	 Figure 1A and 3A taken from https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22
	Article 11 The western blots featured at Figure 1A appear to have four sets of similar looking bands despite being depicted as different samples  Figure 1A taken from https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22
Statement of Allegation	It was alleged that the Respondent had potentially breached the following Principles and Researcher Responsibilities of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research ('the Code'):

	• P1: Honesty in the development, undertaking and reporting of research. Present information truthfully and accurately in proposing, conducting and reporting research • P7: Accountability for the development, undertaking and reporting of research • R22: Retain clear, accurate, secure and complete records of all research including research data and primary materials • R23: Disseminate research findings responsibly, accurately and broadly
Evidence	From Complainant • Link to allegations on PubPeer – https://pubpeer.com/search?q=%22Chrishan+S.+Samuel%22 From the Respondent • Responses to questions asked by RIO via email • Imagery, documents and presentations relevant to Article 5, Article 6, Article 7, Article 9, Article 10 and Article 11 Other information considered • Enhanced analysis of images of concern relevant to Articles 9, 10 and 11
Findings	After considering all relevant information, it is the determination of the AO that there is sufficient evidence to establish a breach of the Code. The AO gave consideration to each of the concerns raised by the Complainant on PubPeer, and the responses provided by the Respondent in conjunction with each of the articles in question. The AO found as follows: Articles 5, 6 and 7 The allegations made in relation to Articles 5, 6 and 7 all related to the same image (albeit rotated and / or inverted) being used in different contexts, to represent findings which represented the result of different treatments or settings. In his response to questions asked by the RIO, the Respondent acknowledged the error in each case and reaffirmed that <i>“there was absolutely no intent to manipulate or mislead”</i>, but that the error was an <i>“honest human error during the handling of a large number of images in what is often a meticulous but complex process”</i>. The Respondent noted that he <i>“did not take part in the labelling of images, analysis of images or assembly of figures”</i> and that the imagery in each of these articles was taken from a <i>“body of work of a student that I supervised in my Lab at Monash Pharmacology [...] who completed her Honours project in 2019 and PhD from February 2022 – April 2023.”</i> The Respondent further noted that he regularly met with his student <i>“during her Honours and PhD to discuss her progress and data generated...”</i> and that in all cases a structured and blinded workflow for all image-based experiences was conducted which involved: • Each image assigned a coded ID at acquisition, which concealed the group identity to prevent bias • A separate researcher to assist with performing a decoding step once all quantification was complete • The decoded IDs used to reveal groups, perform data analysis and generate quantitative outputs Once these steps were undertaken, the Respondent noted that <i>“representative images were chosen to illustrate each group (based on the group’s mean value from the quantitative analysis). For this, several candidate images were shortlisted that best reflected the data in each group investigated.”</i> The Respondent provided the following explanations for the errors observed with respect to each of the articles: • Article 5: <i>“During the final figure assembly step – where candidate images were transferred into a selection folder for figure compilation – an inadvertent duplication error occurred. Specifically,</i>

	for Figure 5a (TGF- β1 analysis), the same image from the +1x10⁶ BM-MSc Comb group was inadvertently duplicated and used as a representative image for + Perindopril group. This likely occurred due to their close proximity within the representative image panel layout. Similarly, in Figure 5b (α-SMA analysis), the same image from the +0.5x10⁶ BM-MSc Comb group was inadvertently duplicated and used again for the +1x10⁶ BM-MSc Comb group. This was likely due to close positioning of the files within the panel layout and the use of a similar file naming convention.” • Article 6: “I have found the Day 5 IRI+BM-MSc-eGFP image that was inadvertently mislabelled and mistakenly included as a representative image for the Day 14 BM-MSCs-eRLX+GFP group in Figure 3B of the article. As a result, the two figure panels reflect the same image. In addition, I understand that the version that appears under the Day 14 BM-MSCs-eRLX+GFP label was rotated during the process of arranging images into the 3x3 layout. This rotation was not deliberate, but rather a result of routine handling: on MacBooks, it is common for image files to rotate or flip when dragged, tapped or rearranged within PowerPoint or Preview, particularly when using the Touch Bar or trackpad. This likely occurred during layout refinement and was not recognised prior to submission.” • Article 7: “During the final figure assembly step — where candidate images were transferred into a selection folder for figure compilation — an inadvertent duplication error occurred between an image that was included for the +RLX group and +RLX+BM-MSCs group - this was from sample 114 which belongs to the +RLX+BM-MSCs group.” In all cases the Respondent noted the significant number of raw images available to choose from and sent evidence of other image options which could have been selected as representative images instead. The Respondent also noted that with respect to Article 7 in particular, the publishing journal Elsevier had acknowledged the Respondent’s explanation for the error and agreed to publication of a corrigendum. The AO considered all the evidence provided by the Respondent along with his explanations for the errors observed in Articles 5, 6 and 7. Whilst the AO accepted the possibility of human error, the AO did find it a perplexing coincidence that the same images had accidentally been used to represent different treatment groups on 4 separate occasions (twice in Article 5), particularly as there were many other images from each representative group available to select from. Whilst the AO did not accept the explanation that it is routine for images to flip or rotate on Macbooks when dragged from one location to another, it was clear to the AO that the student being supervised by the Respondent required clearer guidance from the Respondent around image handling and presentation, acceptable labelling nomenclature and data storage given the confusion over which images had already been selected. Articles 9, 10 and 11 The allegations made in relation to Articles 9, 10 and 11 relate to a suggestion that multiple bands upon 4 western blots displayed across these articles, have been copied and pasted in the same and / or opposing directions. The Respondent noted that all imagery had been generated by a former PhD student he had supervised at the Florey Institute who completed her PhD from August 2010 – March 2014. Despite seeking access to lab books from the Florey Institute, the Respondent noted that the raw files for these images were not able to be located. Accordingly, further analysis by the RIO was conducted using the published imagery available. In response to the allegations presented, the Respondent noted the following with respect to each of the articles: • Article 9: “...I can only say again that the uniform nature of the background of the Coomassie blue-stained blot shown (which was included to show the equal loading of protein samples) indicates that bands were not copied and pasted from one part of the gel to create another part of the gel.” • Article 10: “The allegation that we copied and pasted or stretched a single band or two bands from one part of a blot to create another part of the blot, on multiple instances, seems implausible.
--	---

	<i>So many manipulations would leave very obvious subtle changes in the background of the blots which would indicate that they had been moved around. Such telltale signs are not apparent to us."</i> • Article 11: <i>"As for article 11, while there is a similar pattern across the bands shown for total ERK1/2 (MAPK) in Figure 1, this was not unexpected with total ERK1/2, where blots show equal loading of protein samples – so if anything, if equal amounts of protein were loaded, the bands may look similar. Once again, I can only reiterate that we would have corrected the end-point measured from each sample for the corresponding house-keeping or total protein expression from that same sample – so the actual quantification data shown is properly corrected for. There would have been nothing gained by trying to manipulate a blot to show the equal loading of samples. In our experience, if house-keeping or total protein blots do not show the equivalent loading of protein samples, we re-analyse the protein content of our samples and re-run the Western blot procedure (on the revised loading of protein samples)."</i> When enlarged, it was clear to the AO that the figures questioned in Articles 9 and 11 possessed the hallmarks of imagery that had been manipulated; distinct straight lines and clear boxes around bands highly suggestive of sections being pasted over the top of an existing image (see Appendix A). The AO agreed that some of the bands questioned by the Complainant in Article 10 possessed superficial similarities which were visibly obvious. Upon enlargement of figures 1a and 3a, a distinct line was visible at the edges of the western blot rows suggestive that all the bands in the same row had been excised from the same image into a new document ready for presentation. Distinct lines around single pairs of bands however, suggestive of particular pairs being cut and pasted multiple times as was alleged, could not be conclusively determined by the AO from the quality of the imagery available for analysis. The AO commends the Respondent's cooperation in attempting to gather the raw imagery, and reaching out to his former students' to obtain as much information as possible to respond to the RIO. The AO noted however that the Respondent mentioned with respect to Articles 9 and 11 that his PhD student has <i>"relocated internationally and changed computer hardware on multiple occasions. As a result of this, she indicated that she no longer has access to the original blot or gel image files."</i> Similarly, with respect to the raw imagery relevant to the concerns raised in Articles 5, 6, and 7, the Respondent noted that his PhD student had <i>"...left the lab a few years ago and had got herself a new laptop [and that] we acknowledge that some raw data stored locally at the time may no longer be accessible."</i> The AO was concerned by these statements for two reasons; (1) it is requirement of the Code that data is retained appropriately for at least 5 years from the date of publication to ensure accessibility by interested parties and Articles 5, 6, 7, and 11 all fall within this time period, and (2) the suggestion that data was housed locally on individual student devices and not on Monash University approved shared drives as University procedures require to ensure that data is backed up, readily accessible and protected in circumstances of staff turnover.
Decision & Recommendations	In line with s.8.2 of the Procedure, the AO advises the DO that there is sufficient evidence of a Code Breach with respect to Articles 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11 and makes the following recommendation(s): • That Monash University contact the editors of the impacted journals to advise them of the outcome of this assessment so that they may choose whether any further action is required to correct the record. The AO notes that the Respondent has already been in contact with the Editor of Article 7 and that a corrigendum has been published on 20 February 2026 • That the Respondent undertake an audit of their data management position to ensure all data underpinning any publication from the last 5 years is stored as per the requirements of Monash University's Research Data Management Policy & Procedure and provide evidence of this audit to our office within 3 months of receipt of this letter • That the Respondent create a Standard Operating Procedure for data management in their lab in line with Monash University's Research Data Management Policy & Procedure and ensure all members of their lab are trained on this procedure. Evidence of this procedure and of all staff receiving training must be provided to our office within 3 months of receipt of this letter • That the Respondent, as senior / corresponding author upon manuscripts going forward, ensure they check all primary data used for figures produced by their students / ECRs prior to submitting a manuscript for publication.

	• The Respondent be reminded that while this matter has been assessed as a breach of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, that repeated breaches may be considered serious breaches under the <i>Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Code</i>. Failing to correct practices leading to such breaches would be considered recklessness, may constitute research misconduct and be managed under the relevant provisions of the Enterprise Agreement • That the Respondent provide training to current and future HDR students on acceptable practices of image processing. The Respondent may consider having their students undertake the Office of Research Integrity training available at: https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/RlandImages/default.html • That the Respondent undertake Monash University's Research Integrity Training Module – 'Research Integrity in Practice' within 14 days of receipt of this letter • That the Assessment findings be shared with the Deputy Dean Research, MNHS, and they provide counselling to ensure such breaches are not repeated.
--	---

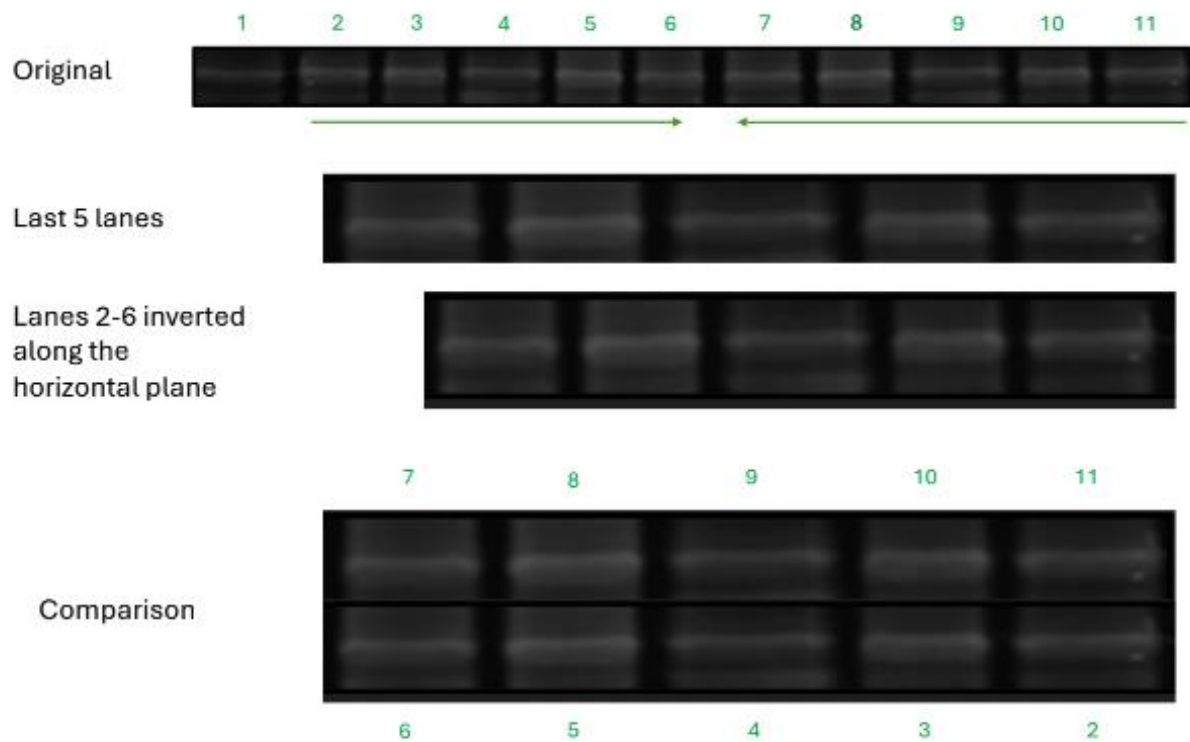
I thank you for your cooperation and willingness to participate in this process. Please be reassured the seriousness of these that breaches has been communicated to the Respondent and any further issues concerning the integrity of his research will be treated as a disciplinary matter. In closing, I would like to remind you of the confidential nature of this matter and ask that you please keep it private and in strict confidence.

Yours sincerely,

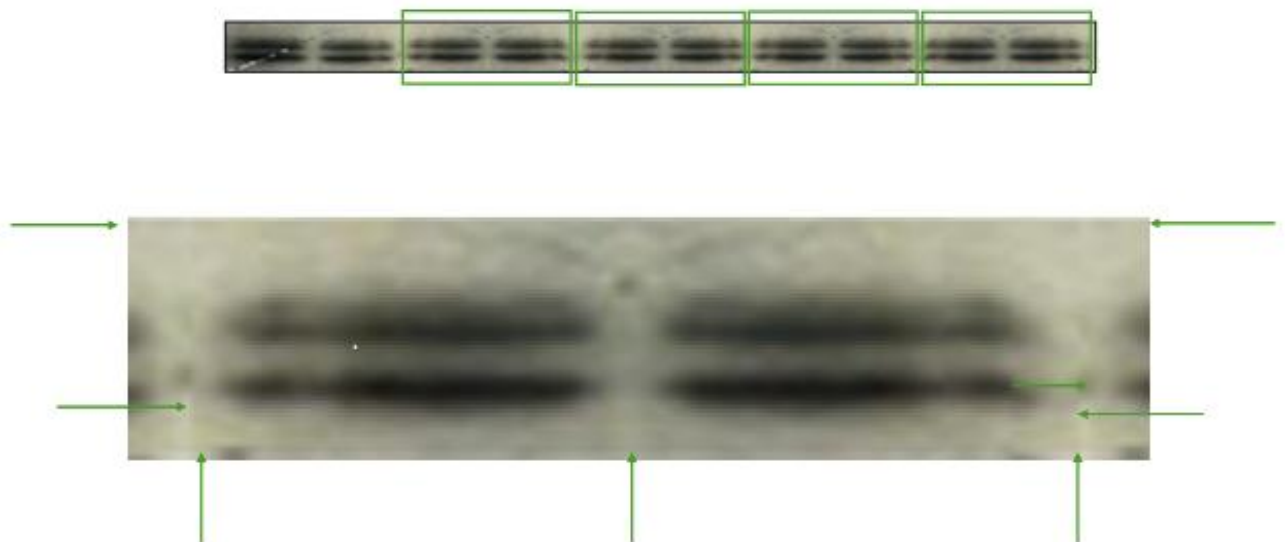


Professor John Carroll
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
MONASH UNIVERSITY

Appendix A



Article 9: Image above shows Figure 6D taken from Article 9. Bands alleged to be copied and pasted are enlarged, flipped and aligned to show that when placed side by side, band characteristics appear identical.



Article 11: Image above shows Figure 1A taken from Article 11. Pairs of bands alleged to be copied and pasted multiple times across the image are enlarged to reveal straight lines around each of the pairs, indicative of being copied and pasted onto the existing Western blot image