

Schmeiser's Win Is Shallow PR

The anti-GM lobby has claimed a moral victory, but the public shouldn't confuse this commercial dispute with the safety of GM products.

Percy Schmeiser remains the pin-up boy for activists opposed to genetically modified (GM) foods. Schmeiser, a Canadian canola farmer, famously took agricultural giant Monsanto to the courts when the company found evidence that he had been using its GM Round-Up Ready seeds without a licence.

The Supreme Court found in favour of Monsanto, ruling that Schmeiser had infringed Monsanto's patent when he recognised cross-contamination of his crop with Round-up Ready canola yet knowingly collected the cross-bred seed and then replanted and harvested it the next year.

"I have always campaigned on the right of a farmer to save and re-use his own seed," Schmeiser said in a media statement released after the Supreme Court decision in 2004. While the traditional rights of farmers to save seed must be protected, the issue should not be confused with the safety of GM technology. Unfortunately both Schmeiser and anti-GM activists continue to

confuse the two issues in pursuit of their own ends.

In Schmeiser's case he claimed in 2004: "I didn't take advantage or profit from Monsanto's technology in my fields". However, his website is still accepting donations for his legal costs, with payments to be made to the "Fight Genetically Altered Food Fund Inc".

In Australia, Gene Ethics has also been pushing Schmeiser's barrel. Last month the anti-GM lobby group issued a press release claiming "GM justice finally" after Schmeiser was awarded \$660 costs against Monsanto. The payment was brought against the company for costs associated with removing Round-up Ready canola from his fields.

Once again the issue in question had nothing to do with the safety of GM canola, nor was it about the legal power of a corporate giant over a simple farmer – Monsanto had offered to remove its GM canola from Schmeiser's fields in 2005, but Schmeiser had refused as the company had insisted he sign a non-



Cover Story

Evidence for the importance of astronomy in aboriginal culture comes from the Emu in the Sky, visible as dark clouds in the Milky Way, standing above her engraving in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. She is only in this position when real-life emus are laying their eggs.

Photo and digital montage: Barnaby Norris

disclosure agreement.

Such an agreement would have stifled anti-GM PR efforts, and maybe donations to Schmeiser too.

**Australasian
Science**
australasianscience.com.au

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Australasian Science is supported by Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty and renowned science broadcaster Robyn Williams, representing excellence in science and its communication.

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Rates are at australasianscience.com.au

DISTRIBUTION:
Gordon & Gotch Ltd

PRINTING:
BPA Print Group, 11 Evans St, Burwood,
Vic. 3125, Australia.

PRINT POST APPROVED PP 331379/0032

ISSN 1442-679X *RRP \$7.95 incl. GST

PUBLISHED 10 times per year. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the publisher.

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