



## Submission to Inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions

1. Southern Star Entertainment Pty Limited and its related companies (**Southern Star**) is Australia's largest independent production and distribution group with content production activities across Australian television drama, entertainment and quality Children's programming. Recent programs produced with ABC Television include the signature mini-series, *Paper Giants (Birth of Cleo magazine)* and, in addition to the first animated series of *Bananas in Pyjamas*, other children's animation including *Bottletop Bill*, *Classic Tales* and *Tracey McBean* as well as the live action children's surfing drama, *Bluewater High* which have been sold in territories throughout the world. Other recent Southern Star production credits are listed at the end of our submission.
2. Partnering with independent producers who bring specialist skills and international financing to fund projects is the reality of television production today, especially in the animation field. The circumstances surrounding the ABC's decision to rejuvenate *Bananas in Pyjamas* from a defunct 'costume' pantomime series to an animated co-production with Southern Star illustrates this reality and the benefits to the ABC, its audiences and the wider production industry. Without Southern Star's specialist skills in Children's TV production and animation (over 30 years) and its ability to secure significant international finance (50% of the production budget), the new animated series of *Bananas in Pyjamas* would not have happened.
3. Paragraph (e) of the Terms of Reference might be construed as suggesting the ABC ended internal production of the original costume series in order to 'outsource' production to Southern Star, resulting in detrimental 'impact' upon existing ABC staff. That is not the case. The ABC's production of the original six series of the 'costume' program ended in 2001, ten years before the ABC produced the first series of the animated version with Southern Star. As far as Southern Star is aware, at that time ABC studio crew and facilities personnel went on, like the writers, actors, composers and other 'freelance' persons engaged on the original series, to work on other projects in the ordinary course of production cycles.
4. When the ABC approached Southern Star in mid 2009 it was on the basis that the ABC considered the original costume drama could not, if rejuvenated, meet the expectations of children's audiences in today's multi-media environment. An animated version of *Bananas* was an obvious alternative given animation techniques allow for imaginative storylines, greater action and visual effects which can compete with other sophisticated offerings in Australian and overseas markets. However, the high cost and the specialist skills required to produce such a quality animation program imposes limits on what a local broadcaster can achieve in this area alone.
5. For over thirty years, Southern Star has developed and maintained a highly skilled animation department in Sydney comprising a team of up to twelve full time staff from time to time of animation directors, designers and storyboard artists. Like many other broadcasters, the ABC does not have the full range of animation skills and equipment required to produce 104 episodes

of an animated series like *Bananas*. It is a unique type of resource which Southern Star is committed to maintaining in Australia. If it didn't, these skills would be lost in our local industry.

6. As an independent producer, Southern Star not only brings specialist animation skills to the table but also co-production and distribution financing that the ABC cannot access in its capacity as a broadcaster. This is especially critical given the high cost of producing quality animation. Without Southern Star's 50% contribution to the cost of producing the new series, the animated *Bananas in Pyjamas* could not have been financed and produced by a broadcaster alone to a standard that audiences expect today without comprising its ability to commission other children's programming at current licence fee and investment levels. Further, we understand from the ABC that as a result of its partnering with Southern Star, every dollar ABC Television spends on the animated version of *Bananas* delivers twice as many minutes of program content compared to what would have been the case if the ABC had recommenced production of the original costume series.
7. Production arrangements for the animated *Bananas* series also benefit the wider Australian production industry from which Southern Star engages script writers, voice actors, designers, music composers and other creative personnel. Far from having a negative impact on employment opportunities, the ABC in working with an independent producer has, in giving new life to the *Bananas* property, created employment for many creative artists and production personnel.
8. The ABC retains control over production and ownership of the Bananas brand and intellectual property. Southern Star's production team works under the supervision of ABC Television's nominated Executive Producer and all key creative inputs and decisions including direction, script-writing, character voices, character and production design, storyboards, music and song composition as well as all post-production is carried out by Australians in Australia and over 50% of the production budget is spent in Australia (only the technical animation and coloring process is undertaken at Southern Star's studio in Singapore). The animated *Bananas in Pyjamas* therefore qualifies as an 'Australian program' under the Australian Content Standard (2005).
9. The integrated worldwide distribution network that Southern Star brings to the project means that the *Bananas* brand is finding new international audiences with the series to be rolled out in markets across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and other territories this year. In fact, the new animated series is already on air on Channel 5 in the UK and across Europe via Cartoon network. In addition to retaining its local broadcast rights and ensuring creative and ownership controls over this iconic property remain in Australia, the ABC effectively benefits from revenues flowing from the worldwide exploitation of the program.
10. By working with an independent producer, local employment opportunities have been generated, a greater level of co-financing obtained and a high quality program delivered with an international reach, all with a smaller investment by the ABC and for more programming minutes when compared to the original series. The new *Bananas in Pyjamas* is a production model that should be embraced not only by the ABC and production industry but the wider Australian community. ABC Television and Southern Star have worked successfully together to reinvigorate the intellectual property of the *Bananas* brand in a new format generating new audiences, new employment opportunities and new revenue streams, including internationally.

## **About Southern Star**

Southern Star Entertainment is Australia's largest independent television production and distribution group with content production in drama, entertainment and children's programming. Recent Australian dramas include *Paper Giants* (ABC), *Offspring* (Network Ten), *Rush* (Ten), *Wild Boys* (Seven Network), *Rescue Special Operations* (Nine Network), *Love My Way* (FOXTEL), and *Tangle* (Showtime). Southern Star also produces quality Children's live action and animation programs including *Bananas in Pyjamas* (ABC) *Bluewater High* (ABC), *Bottletop Bill* (ABC), *Sea Princesses* (Seven) and *Hi-5* (Nine). In non-scripted, Southern Star produces *Deal or No Deal* (Seven), *Beauty & the Geek* (Seven), *Wipeout* (Nine), *Undercover Boss* (Ten), *Ready Steady Cook* (Ten) and has produced *Strictly Dancing* (ABC) and *Face Painting with Bill Leak* (ABC).

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