This submission focuses mainly on these points included in the terms of reference:

>The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

<The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

>The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education and

>The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages

First I would like to introduce myself and inform you of my experiences relating to those points above.

This will be followed by comments from parents, teachers, students and community members who have been involved with, and have knowledge of what I have been doing on my country for many years.

I will then relate to you the opinions of the teachers that I work with weekly, and who I interviewed, with the sole purpose of addressing those points above.

My name is Nyoka Hatfield but I'm also known by my nick name which happens to be 'Nicky'. I am a Dharumbal Aboriginal woman, born and bred on my traditional country.

My home is in Rockhampton, Central Queensland. This area is recognised by the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community as being Dharumbal country.

Over the last ten years I have been promoting my Dharumbal culture and language on my country in different ways. I often do 'Welcome to Country' speeches in my traditional language and hold cultural awareness workshops for different child carers, including high school and primary school teachers. I also get requests to enter schools to tell my Dharumbal stories and teach some of my culture and language, many of these requests, usually only come once a year at NAIDOC time.

I had the dream of teaching my traditional Dhraumbal culture and language in schools on my country, this dream came to fruition in the early months of 2008.

Allan Bird, who is the manager of the 'Indigenous Schooling Support Unit' in Rockhampton, approached me with the idea of having a meeting with

Kaylene Wright, who at that time was the principal of the Crescent Lagoon State Primary School (Cresso). After this meeting I began teaching my Dharumbal culture and language every Friday for two hours to years one and six at Cresso.

I conducted four classes, each lasting a half hour. From the beginning the students could not get enough, they thoroughly enjoyed my lessons and every week I would hear complaints because one class would always use up another classes time.

In 2009 I continued teaching at Cresso doing three hours on Fridays which included years prep, one and two. Crescent Lagoon was the first school on Dharumbal country to complete a year of what I call the Dharumbal Culture and Language Program (DCLP). Needless to say the students, teachers, parents and I, also the community of Cresso were all very proud of this achievement.

In 2010 my hours at Cresso increased to three and a half and included years prep to three and I completed another year there. This year 2011, I teach the full day each Friday which is four and a half hours and includes again, years prep to three.

During 2009 word got around about me and what I did, this lead to an increase in the number of schools I attended. Since 2009 I have taught my Dharumbal culture and language at Port Curtis, Mount Archer, Berserker Street and Lakes Creek State Primary Schools on a weekly basis. I have made short term visits to Glenmore and Rockhampton High Schools and I have also granted requests to visit an Independent and Catholic schools.

Currently I teach weekly at Crescent Lagoon, Allenstown, Marmor, Glenmore and Waraburra State Primary Schools, which on an average includes five hundred students a week. All of the students and most of the teachers address me as Nhaya Nicky, Nhaya meaning Aunty.

At this point in my submission I would like to relate some stories and comments from those people whom I have come in contact with during my time spent teaching my Dharumbal culture and language.

In 2008, after one of my very first year six classes, a teacher that accompanied the students said that it had been a very long time since he had seen a particular student sit quietly and listen for an entire lesson. This student had behaviour problems and I don’t know if he was indigenous or not, but he ended up being one of my leaders when we sometimes performed for the entire school.

In 2009 at one of the high schools that I visited, my first class were the Indigenous year eights, these students then had a Japanese language class to attend (it was compulsory for them), while my next class, were the Indigenous year nines. The year eights were practically begging the Indigenous school worker to let them miss the Japanese class and stay with me. I explained to the students that I would just be repeating what I had already told them, but they said that it didn't matter, they would rather stay with me and were very disappointed when they weren't allowed. Some of the year nines did repeat my class with the year tens, even though I told them the same thing that I told the year eights.

Sadly I only attended those classes three or four times because it was for the coming NAIDOC celebrations. A month or so later I was talking to one of those students who informed me that most of the Indigenous students wished that I could go back permanently. I told him that I would have loved to have been able to do that.

I have parents and carers approaching me and introducing themselves, they then tell me their children's reactions regarding my teachings and while they are talking to me, some of them actually use Dharumbal words that their children have taught them.

One of the most common comments from parents and carers is that what I am doing is wonderful and their children love it. Other comments are that the children were becoming more aware of their surroundings and the environment after being taught how the Aboriginals lived, survived, and looked after their country.

Another comment from a prep student's parent was that she had never seen children at such a young age, thinking and talking each day about 'yadaba', which in my language means respect. She went on further to say that her son who is now in year two, tells her the Dharumbal names for the animals and birds and asks her questions about Aboriginal names for different things which she says she cannot possibly answer. She also said that every time they got visitors her son would proudly sing the songs I had taught him.

Because having yadaba for all life is what Aboriginal culture is based on, it is one of the first things I talk to and teach the children about, this includes all grades from prep to year twelve.

I teach all the students how to sing Happy Birthday in my language, and two different parents proudly told me that at two different parties, the host was not allowed to blow out the candles, because their children insisted that first they would sing Happy Birthday in Dharumbal language.

A further comment from the Indigenous community is that they are very proud of what I am doing.

I will now relate the comments from those teachers who are usually always present when I am teaching their class. Many of these teachers are also learning themselves for the first time about Aboriginal culture and language.

I interviewed these teachers because I truly believe that it is they who are the best to judge whether there are any benefits derived from including Indigenous languages in early education, and if they contribute in any way to Closing the Gap, and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture. These comments were from a broad range of teachers from the twenty-three classes that I teach weekly.

A common comment was that all of the children were learning to have respect for Indigenous culture and language. Other comments were that students are learning their country's history and how it has changed over the years and also about its rich Indigenous culture.

Teachers said that the children are learning to connect to the local land where they live, they are learning to value this land, and that it is their responsibility to care for their country.

The students are learning to understand and value other cultures and languages.

Children should be exposed to other cultures at a young age, the younger the better. Racist thoughts do not enter their minds until they reach older grades, so exposing them to other cultures at a young age teaches them to have tolerance for others who are different than themselves, this includes disabled people who may be deaf, blind or use a wheelchair etc.

Some teachers said that the curriculum is already full and while more subjects are being included, nothing is being taken out and this is making their jobs difficult. These same teachers also noted that teaching Indigenous language is a good thing.

Most of the teachers when commenting on the Indigenous students said it builds up their self esteem, confidence and ability in themselves. They feel special because it's their culture and language that is being taught.

One of the teachers said that it made them try harder, she went on to say that during other classes they didn't usually put their hands up, but in my class they were always raising their hands because they knew the answers and this came from them listening and thinking.

A few of the teachers said that they thought my teachings assisted with the rate of the Indigenous student's school attendance though it still needed to be raised more.

Another comment was that all children should learn another language, it stimulates the mind and does make children listen and think.

The majority of the teachers commented in support of my teaching methods and how I interact and connect with the students, they also said that the teaching of Indigenous culture and language must be taught by an Indigenous person for it to mean anything.

When I enter a classroom for the first time one of the first things I ask the students is "Do you know what an Aboriginal of Australia is or what they look like", most of the answers I receive are that they have black and or brown skin. After six months I ask that same question to the same students, and while I still get the black and brown skin answer, there are many other knowledgeable answers, and these answers are given with pride of that knowledge that these children have learnt in those six months.

When it comes to my DCLP the students of Crescent Lagoon have advanced to the stage where they create their own books with their own stories and illustrations. Some of these stories are moral stories like, always be kind, never be greedy and do unto others etc. I feel very proud and humble when I read these books because they are dominated by my Dharumbal culture and language.

I have seen many positive outcomes, which have occurred during my time spent with students and teachers over the last four years.

On several occasions at some of the schools where I have introduced myself, I have had Indigenous children, at the end of the lesson, coming up to me and asking me who their mob was and what was their totem. Some of these children I am able to assist, while with the others I know that I have started them on a journey to seek out their Aboriginal history.

I have never received nor asked for help from the government. I have always been supported and assisted financially by Darumbal Enterprises, which is an independent company owned and operated by Dharumbal people. It is only recently that I sought help from a government department to document my language in a dictionary by using a computer program called Miromaa.

To sum up my submission, I believe that what I am doing is an enormous step towards reconciliation and Closing the Gap for the present time and for the future. I also believe that Indigenous language maintenance and

revitalisation programs should be supported where ever possible, without these programs our Indigenous languages will slowly disappear. What is also very important is that Indigenous languages need to be taught in schools and for it to be done in a culturally appropriate manner.

When white people first came to Australia language was a barrier between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, it was one of the causes of the disastrous relationship that developed from the very beginning, and that continues to this day. We need to turn that barrier into a language bridge by giving all Australians a chance to learn about that which belongs to their country.