



Erin Brockovich joins fight against Alcoa

PERTH - US environmental campaigner Erin Brockovich has joined West Australian residents to examine the merits of a court case against mining giant Alcoa.

About 160 Yarloop residents have complained of respiratory problems, skin irritation, sore throats and eyes, extreme fatigue, mental dysfunction, stomach upset, blood noses, cancers and organ failure in the last 11 years.

They claim emissions from Alcoa's Wagerup refinery are causing the ill effects.

Ms Brockovich, whose environmental campaign against a Californian mining company was made famous by Julia Roberts in the Hollywood movie Erin Brockovich, agreed to review the case after receiving an email from a Yarloop resident.

"We think we live in a big world but it's really smaller than you think," Ms Brockovich said.

"Somebody from the area that was sick, from what they believe to be Alcoa, emailed me.

"I was intrigued with her illnesses and concerned at what she was suffering through and recommended one of our toxicologists see her and he did.

"After he did some testing and researching he said 'this is something you should look into.'"

Alcoa has bought some properties around the refinery but real estate values for the remaining homes in Yarloop have dived.

Yarloop resident and Community Alliance for Positive Solutions action group chairman Vince Puccio said residents just wanted a fair go.

"What we are about is not about shutting Alcoa down, it's about accountability and for them to take full responsibility for what they've done," Mr Puccio said.

"It's got nothing to do with shutting it down.

"What we want is a fair go for everybody ... not just for Alcoa."

Lawyer Simon Morrison, who is acting as Ms Brockovich's Australian lawyer, said it was too early to start talking about dollars or compensation but he was confident the residents had a good case.

"Obviously to look into the case you have to have some sort of case before you start," Mr Morrison said.

"We wouldn't be here if we didn't think there were reasonable prospects in the case.

"It's far too early to start talking dollars.

"What we do know is, something has gone terribly wrong.

"In terms of how much money would compensate these people for what has happened, the short answer is as many dollars as it takes."

Alcoa of Australia later said its Wagerup refinery was the most studied industrial facility in WA and had been deemed safe for employees and neighbouring communities. AAP