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Environmental crusader Erin Brockovich

ERIN BROCKOVICH TO SHINE

Former US beauty queen turned legal heavyweight Erin Brockovich, will bring a fresh ethos to the litigation halls of Shine Lawyers after signing a partnership deal.

JASON OXENBRIDGE

THE high profile crusader has built a reputation on 'standing up for the little guy' and will help take on the tough cases at Shine Lawyers.

Splitting responsibility between Los Angeles and Brisbane, Brockovich the brand was thrust into the stratosphere following the 2000 self-titled film starring Julia Roberts.

Brockovich says she became a 'reluctant public figure' following the success of the picture, which netted Pretty Woman star Roberts an Oscar, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA Award.

The narrative was drawn from the inspirational tale of one woman's fight for justice for the people who lived in and around Hinkley, California, in the 1960's, 70's and 80's who had been severely compromised by exposure to toxic Chromium 6. The Chromium 6 had leaked into the groundwater from the nearby Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Compressor Station.

In 1996, despite the lack of a formal law school education, Brockovich teamed up with Ed Masry

to spearhead the largest direct action lawsuit of its kind. As a result, the utility giant paid the largest toxic tort injury settlement in US history – around \$US333 million in damages to more than 600 Hinkley residents.

"After being seriously injured in a traffic accident in Reno, my kids and I moved back to Southern California where I hired Jim Vittoe of Masry & Vittoe to handle my auto accident case in 1991," explains Brockovich.

"Not long after my case was resolved, I was hired to work at the law firm as a file clerk. While organizing papers in a pro bono real estate case, I found medical records in the file that caught my eye. After getting permission from one of the firm's principals, Ed Masry, I began to research the matter."

While nothing could prepare her for the ensuing, incessant media attention, it did highlight a greater plight – justice for everyday victims trampled by large scale corporates.

"Over time, I realised I could use my notoriety to spread positive messages of personal empowerment and for me to encourage people to stand up and make a difference," says Brockovich.

This led to the hit television project, an ABC special entitled Challenge America with Erin Brockovich.

"I set out to motivate and organize hundreds of volunteers and donated resources to help rebuild a dilapidated park in downtown Manhattan a few months following 9/11," she says.

While in Australia speaking at an environmental forum, the partners at Shine Lawyers seized an opportunity to contact Brockovich. Shine co-executive director Simon Morrison occurred a meeting soon after in LA.

"It's a privilege to work with Erin, she epitomises what we do. She has a knack for picking things out," he says.

"We first met in 2007 at an environment

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Erin Brockovich

conference. We flew her up to Brisbane and the week after I was heading to America. I contacted her law firm and they suggested that I call into LA on the way through. I stayed a week and we took it from there."

Brockovich, 49, says the opportunity to tackle the tough gigs in Australia was part the catalyst behind her decision to join Shine. She receives 'hundreds of calls and emails' from Australians wanting her help.

Her first major case outside the US involved Alcoa's Wagerup alumina refinery in WA.

A multiple plaintiff action against Alcoa has been filed after Brockovich was convinced the refinery is responsible for the health problems

of people in Yarloop, Hamel and Cookernup, 120km south of Perth. The prominent anti-pollution campaigner says her American law firm has filed litigation against the US mining giant in the States. She will then focus her attention on delivering for her new Brisbane firm.

"Like me, Shine has a reputation for standing up for ordinary people and never shying away from a tough case," she says.

"I chose to work with Shine Lawyers over any other Australian law firm because I believe in what they are doing. Together we will take on the tough cases and help right the wrongs for every day Australians."

Shine Lawyers co-executive director Stephen



**Shine co-executive director
Simon Morrison**

Roche, says having the savvy lawyer consulting will bring new knowledge and expertise to the firm.

"This is a great opportunity for Shine to work with an international identity whose interests so closely align to our 'stand up for the little guy' firm values, as we're often up against large institutions," he says.

"Erin's courageous work as an environmental crusader, advocate for the people and champion of truth mean that ordinary Australian can identify with her."

Shine Lawyers has contracted agency Publicis Mojo to create an ad campaign spruiking the appointment of its latest star recruit.