



Erin joins battlers

US giant killer here for WA refinery town

By ANDREA HAYWARD

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, fatigue, mental dysfunction, cancers and organ failure over 11-year period.

They claim emissions from Alcoa's Wagerup refinery are

causing their problems.

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

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

"I was intrigued and concerned at what she was going through and recommended

one of our toxicologists see her and he did. "After he did some testing 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 action group chairman Vince Puccio said they just want a fair go.

"We are not about shutting Alcoa down, it's about them taking responsibility for what they've done," Mr Puccio said.

Lawyer Simon Morrison, 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.

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

"But it's far too early to start talking dollars.

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

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



Intrigued . . . American campaigner Erin Brockovich in Sydney yesterday. *Picture: JUSTIN LLOYD*