



# Erin joins Aussie fight

UNITED States environmental crusader Erin Brockovich is fronting a campaign by a small Australian bush community to sue aluminium giant Alcoa over poisoning claims.

Ms Brockovich has teamed with lawyers to review claims by residents of the town of Yarloop, 100km south of

Perth, that the Wagerup refinery is making them sick.

She described the case as similar to the campaign made famous by the movie *Erin Brockovich*, starring Julia Roberts.

Ms Brockovich led the residents of Hinkley, California, in a law suit against Pacific Gas and Electric that resulted in a record-breaking \$390 million settlement.

She was alerted to the plight of the Yarloop community by an email from a sick resident.

"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," Ms Brockovich said in Perth yesterday.

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

Wagerup will be the world's largest alumina refinery if Alcoa proceeds with a plan to double capacity at the plant in a \$1.5 billion project.

Residents of Yarloop have complained of respiratory problems, skin irritations, fatigue, stomach upset, blood noses and even cancers and organ failure. They believe their health problems are linked to emissions from the Wagerup refinery, and are seeking compensation.

Alcoa has consistently denied that Wagerup is unsafe.

In a statement yesterday, Alcoa of Australia chief medical officer Dr Michael Donoghue said numerous studies had shown that emissions from the Wagerup refinery were "well within" internationally accepted environmental and health guidelines.



**ON A MISSION:** United States anti-pollution campaigner Erin Brockovich, left, in Perth yesterday with Yarloop residents Vince Puccio and Cameron Auxer, whom she is helping. Picture: COLIN MURTY