



Brockovich launches Wagerup class action

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US activist Erin Brockovich has launched a class action lawsuit against mining giant Alcoa on behalf of more than 200 residents living near the company's Wagerup refinery.

Ms Brockovich is working with Australia's Shine Lawyers and a series of US law firms to represent more than 200 residents who have suffered illnesses which they allege are caused by polluting emissions from Alcoa's Wagerup refinery.

When she first visited WA in 2007, Ms Brockovich said the similarities between the Yarloop residents' case and the one that made her famous in the Julia Roberts movie were disturbing. She is expected to return to the town later this year.

Shine Lawyers executive director Simon Morrison said the claim had been filed in the Philadelphia Court in Pennsylvania, where Alcoa's operational headquarters is based, after a long investigation into the allegations of affected Yarloop residents.

He said that for more than a decade people living near the refinery had complained of respiratory problems, skin irritations, sore throats and eyes, extreme fatigue, mental dys-

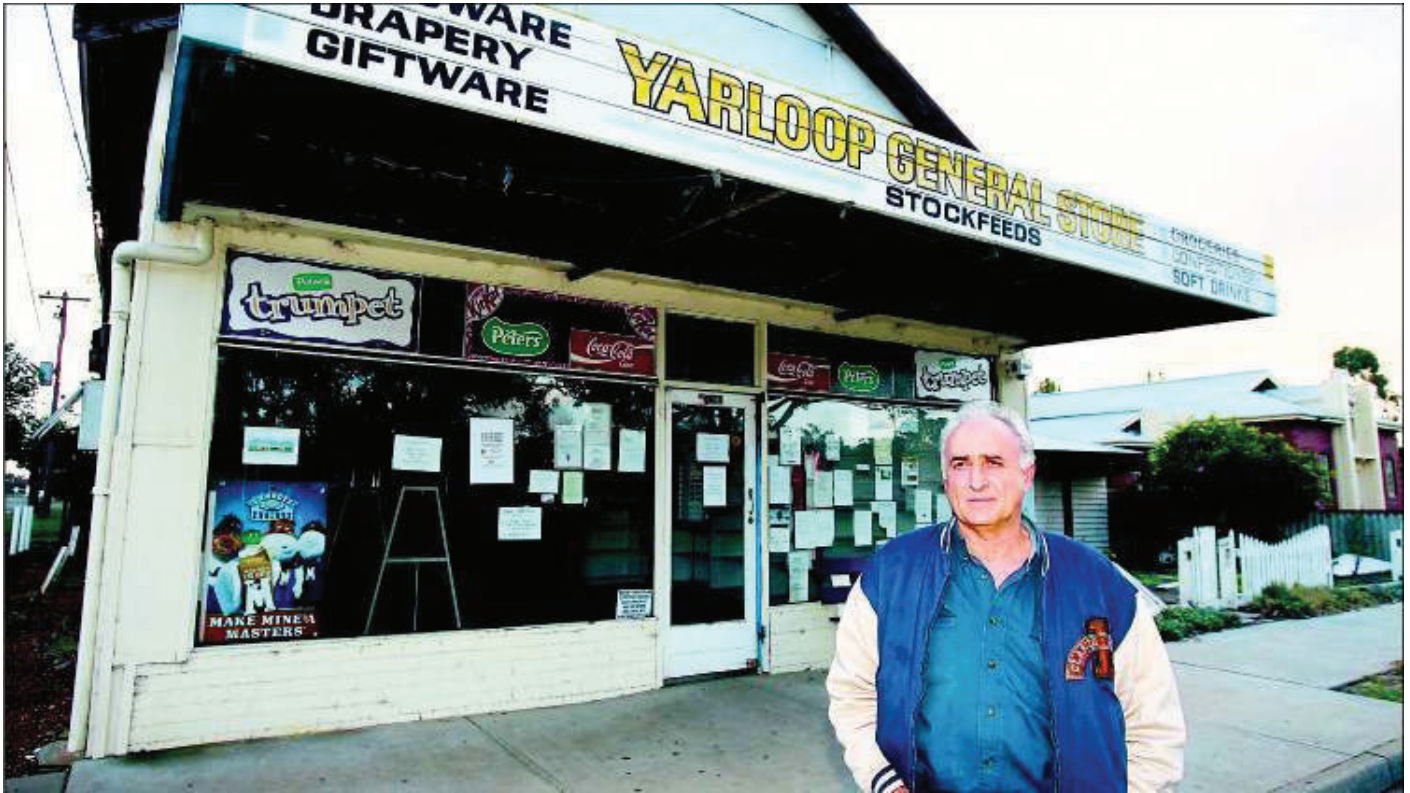
function, stomach upset, blood noses, cancers and organ failure.

"Alcoa has consistently denied that it has done anything wrong but we believe there are grounds to proceed further and our principals have now filed the complaint in the US court," Mr Morrison said.

Yarloop resident and Community Alliance for Positive Solutions action group spokesman Vince Puccio said the community was happy the lawsuit had been filed. He said the locals were now waiting for the next step that could potentially include giving evidence in court.

"It's not about shutting Alcoa down, it's about accountability and for Alcoa to take responsibility for what we say they have done to our community," Mr Puccio said. A statement released by Alcoa said the Wagerup refinery was among the most studied industrial facilities in Australia, with independent studies showing the operations were safe for both employees and surrounding communities.

Alcoa of Australia's managing director Alan Cransberg said the lawsuit's allegations were without merit. "We will defend, in the appropriate forum, our performance and reputation as a company," he said.



Lawsuit welcome: Yarloop protest group spokesman Vince Puccio outside the Yarloop general store that closed eight months ago. Picture: Ian Ferguson