

Askeaton

# Dirty secrets from Down Under



The people of Yarloop in Western Australia have won massive pay-outs after scientists linked toxic emissions from an aluminum refinery to their ill health. In Ireland, the Aughinish Alumina plant has been cleared by the EPA of any responsibility for the ill-health of local people and animals. But the residents of Askeaton in Limerick want to reopen the inquiry

Askeaton, West Limerick. Yarloop, Western Australia. Two towns on different continents nestled in lush rural areas near the coast. Both sets of inhabitants plagued by similar health problems. Only one has finally found an official explanation — toxic emissions from an aluminium plant.



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For the past two decades, farm families in the Askeaton area have alleged their health and that of their animals has suffered because they live close to the Aughinish Alumina plant.

An official investigation totally cleared the aluminium plant of playing any part in the pollution but failed to find a cause for the litany of human and animal health problems.

Now residents are demanding the case be re-opened after an official inquiry into a similar phenomenon in Australia linked industrial pollution from an aluminium refinery to widespread ill health including nausea, aching joints, unexplained pains, irritated nose, burning throat and persistent coughing. These are similar to the persistent problems experienced in the Askeaton and Foynes area.

Aughinish, for its part, said that it had been exonerated and that the issues raised in Australia were not relevant to

home town than the September 11 atrocities.

He caused a national sensation when he gave a parliamentary committee a memo written in July 1990 by Alcoa research scientists, six years after the plant opened. Marked 'confidential', it outlined a range of toxic pollutants called PAHs (polyaromatic hydrocarbons) identified to be spewing in very large measures in plumes from an incinerator stack from his plant. The



Alcoa Alumina Refinery: the Alcoa company has so far paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to workers and local families. Picture by Megan Powell/ The West Australian

## A COSTLY FOUR-YEAR BATTLE

►Former Alcoa worker Dave Thompson won a four-year compensation battle in which he lost his job, house and health.

sensitivities.

"It has been a nightmare. There were a few times I wanted to give it away, but I knew it was only a matter

leaking from its stockpiles of waste is contaminating groundwater at three of its Australian plants.

During a parliamentary inquiry into the Wagerup plant, an Alcoa document was submitted that indicated health-threatening compounds were detected in emissions from another of its facto-

between health problems and Alcoa's refinery. There were meteorological conditions that could connect the refinery with health problems."

Mr Van der Pal says the findings vindicated what they had been saying all along. "They concluded that the Alcoa emissions were causing the symptoms but could not pinpoint what was causing