What can we learn from the Mt Isa case?

Damian Scattini
Principal Maurice Blackburn
Background

- Mt Isa mines operational since 1931

- Today:
  - Operated by Xstrata Mount Isa Mines, a subsidiary of Swiss mining giant, Glencore Xstrata
  - Australia’s leading emitters of arsenic, lead and sulphur dioxide
Mt Isa smelter stack
Mt Isa slag piles
The Qld Government and XMIM have, for some years, maintained a public health campaign for children. This insinuates that lead exposure can be avoided by better parenting.
Victim shaming

- Many Mt Isa residents dismiss the litigants as chasing a dollar, including former Mayor Molony who, in 2009, said litigant mothers were “just a few women chasing a quid”.
- Current Mayor Tony McGrady takes the view that most people who live in the city “understand and appreciate that living here we have to take certain precautions which the bulk of our people do”.

Mayor Tony McGrady

Mayor John Molony
Herculaneum case study

- Herculaneum is a city of 2,800 people, and is the home of America’s biggest lead smelter, first melting lead from ore in 1892. The owner of the smelter is now Doe Run, and previously Fluor Corporation.

- As at 2001:
  - Approximately 22 per cent of children under the age of 6 have high blood-lead levels (the stat average is 8%)
  - At least 510 of the towns 530 residential yards located east of Highway 61-67 are so contaminated with lead that they’ll have to be replaced.
  - Half of dust samples from the town’s schools exceed guidelines. (Heavy Metal Racket by Roland Klose, 2001)