

Slug of sabotage?

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

A defiant Ian Cook has vowed to fight up to 96 charges levelled by Greater Dandenong Council at him and his commercial catering company iCook Foods.

He says his \$26 million Dandenong South company has been wrongfully ruined since it was blamed for the listeria-related death of an elderly hospital patient and shut down by authorities for 36 days in February and March.

Mr Cook arrived at Dandenong Magistrates' Court on 1 August to plead not guilty to what he says are "trumped-up" breaches of food safety laws.

"The inconsistencies, the lies and fabrications have been quite phenomenal," he told reporters.

"It's quite disgusting."

The matter was adjourned for contest mention in October.

Outside the court, Mr Cook claimed that a council inspector planted a slug in the factory.

"I'll allege it all day long or someone can explain how it could happen."

It comes on top of recent claims by whistle-blower and former Greater Dandenong health inspector Kim Rogerson that she was pressured to fabricate evidence against iCook Foods.

"She's never seen a council home in on a particular company with an intention to destroy them," Mr Cook said.

"We have passed every audit for the past 30 years in Dandenong - three audits a year - and then within three days they had us shut and done and dusted."

Mr Cook said the City of Greater Dandenong had a conflict of interest, as a share-



Ian Cook, with son Ben Cook, holds alleged evidence of a planted slug.

Picture: CAM LUCADOU-WELLS

holder in the Meals-on-Wheels provider and "basket-case" Community Chef.

"We're their largest competitor. As soon as we're out of the way, it allows Community Chef to put themselves out there as the only one left in the system."

After the criminal matters, Mr Cook expects to resume his Supreme Court lawsuit against the council and the Department of Health and Human Services.

He says he will seek damages for the destruction of his company and reputation.

"They've destroyed us. They set us up."

A Greater Dandenong Council spokesper-

son said it took the allegations by iCook Foods "extremely seriously".

The council said it had referred the matter to IBAC, which in turn referred the matter to the Victorian Ombudsman for an initial review.

"Following that review the Ombudsman has determined that no further investigation is warranted."

Ms Rogerson has filed an appeal against the Ombudsman's assessment, alleging a "number of errors" in the investigation.

The case was adjourned for a contest mention at Dandenong Magistrates' Court on 3 October.