

# 17077      **The race to Mars is on, even if it's a one-way ticket**

The Courier Mail, February 21, 2017

There's nothing quite like space travel to stuff up your love life. Just ask divorced Brisbane high-school teacher Natalie Lawler, 38.

"I had to say to this lovely guy, 'Look, I need to tell you about the project I'm involved in before we have a second date'.

Indeed, Lawler is one of 100 people from around the world shortlisted from more than 200,000 candidates to join a proposed human settlement on Mars.

The non-profit European-based project launched in 2011 with its goal to colonise Mars, the only planet known to be capable of supporting human life.

The project has already completed feasibility studies in its quest to establish a habitable settlement on Mars – built by unmanned space missions – before specially trained crews attempt human settlement in 2032.

The Mars One project is going to be filming the training processes, the flights, and any eventual Mars landings, turning the whole event into a reality-TV Martian show – but that doesn't mean the project isn't a serious one.

MARS is hot right now. It's not only Mars One in the running to get there first: last year, then-US president Barack Obama announced NASA intends to send astronauts to Mars before the end of the 2030s.

NASA aims to set up a small outpost on the Red Planet, where astronauts can search for signs of life and carry out other research. This camp could be established as early as 2028.

Humankind's desire to reach into space is limitless and we spend billions and billions on missions reaching out into the universe.

Queensland-born astrobiologist Dr Abigail Allwood, 43, says she has no truck with the argument that we should fix problems here on Earth first before heading off to destroy somewhere else.

Allwood is the first female and first Australian principal science investigator on NASA's 2020 Mars Rover mission.

She suggests space exploration wouldn't attract so much money if it didn't appeal to something profound about being human.

"Only time will tell if projects such as Mars One achieve their goals, but you have to start somewhere. For me, part of the beauty in getting to Mars is the sheer number of miracles you have to overcome to do it. When you look at what we've achieved on the current massive budget it's pretty remarkable, but even that's only a fraction of the budget (needed) to get people to Mars."