

**Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON** (The Hills) [5.22 p.m.]: When it comes to pest species, they do not come much peskier than the Indian myna. This aggressive brown bird has become the dominant avian species in many parts of New South Wales, literally chasing away native birds, evicting them from nesting hollows, tossing chicks out of nests onto the ground, and filling nesting holes with rubbish so that other species cannot breed. Mynas attack in gangs of up to 30 birds and are absolutely fearless, dive-bombing cats with impunity and attacking kookaburras, magpies and currawongs. More than 1,000 birds roost in the Castle Hill shopping centre in my electorate, drowning out the traffic noise with their incessant chatter at dusk. Indian mynas have been around a long time—since 1862 when they were introduced into Melbourne to control insects in market gardens. C. J. Dennis wrote a poem about them in 1933 that included the lines:

*So I swagger an' strut an' I cuss an' I swagger.  
I'm wise to the city's hard way.  
A bit of a bloke and a bit of a bragger.  
I've always got plenty to say ...*

A flock of mynas will quickly drive all the native birds out of an area. We do not have to look too far outside Australia to see what can happen. Indian mynas have replaced native birds throughout the South Pacific, Hawaii and Mauritius. I understand that 83 per cent of the birds in Fiji are Indian mynas. In 2000 the World Conservation Union listed them as one of the top 100 invasive species of the world. So great a nuisance do mynas pose, they are considered the second-greatest threat to native birds after habitat loss.

A constituent of mine, Gary Cunich of West Pennant Hills, has devoted the last 18 months of his life and a considerable amount of his own money to reducing the myna menace. He has set up the Indian Myna Eradication Program, which has as its goal the control and eradication of Indian mynas in this country. Naturally, when I heard this my first question was: How does one control them? The answer is simpler than it might seem. The birds are trapped and then killed humanely. Every 3,000 birds caught and killed means 500,000 fewer Indian mynas in three years time. While Indian mynas are highly intelligent, they are also voracious eaters. It is this characteristic that makes it possible to capture them.

Mr Cunich manufactures myna traps locally and sells them for \$385 each. He guarantees that, used properly, they will catch and kill any flock of Indian mynas. They will also last 20 years. When Mr Cunich recently appeared on the John Laws show to talk about what he was doing, the switchboard lit up with more than 600 phone calls from listeners. Councils are the predominant buyers of the traps. Ku-ring-gai Council has 10, but most councils buy only four—for example, Warringah Council has four traps but there simply are not enough to go around.

Mr Cunich makes a small profit on the sale of each trap which he then uses to promote this humane way of dealing with this introduced pest. But the money is not enough to keep the program going. He desperately needs government assistance.

Given the extent of the menace and the fact that, unlike so many plague species, there is a way of dealing with it and it is something that everyone in the community can do if they wish, I think the Government should be putting some money behind Mr Cunich and his crusade. After all, the Indian myna is the second-greatest threat to our native birds and affects crops and farm animals. Surely this is not a threat that we have to live with. Government assistance for the program would lead to private ownership. I ask the Minister to have someone from his office speak to Mr Cunich about practical ways in which the Government could assist him—for example, by subsidising the traps, buying the traps and distributing them to councils, buying traps for Landcare and Bushcare groups, and using them in national parks where Indian mynas are a problem.

Indian mynas are an environmental disaster. If they continue to be ignored by government, within a few generations or less the Indian myna's song may be the only birdsong that is heard throughout much of Australia. The traps are enormously effective. For every 100 traps that are set, 3,000 Indian mynas will be caught and destroyed in a month. Over 12 months, the total number of birds destroyed would be 36,000. Over a three-year period, six million Indian mynas could be destroyed. Unlike other pests, something can be done about controlling Indian mynas. I ask the Government to provide assistance to Mr Cunich.