

ENGLISH: *LANGUAGE ANALYSIS*

2010 VCAA Examination

In his keynote speech 'Taking Stock' delivered to national delegates at the International Biodiversity Conference 2010 held in Japan, Professor Chris Lee summarises the state of biodiversity in the present world and reviews the commitment made in order to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss. In his speech, Professor Lee points out that, unfortunately, people have been too ignorant and complacent about the loss of biological diversity and argues that if action is not taken urgently, irreparable harm will be done to biological life on this Earth, with negative ramifications affecting countless human lives. His tone changes throughout his speech depending on his different messages: from a reflective and regretful tone when discussing the current predicament to an impassioned and urgent one when making a call to action. However, he remains firm on the importance of the variety of biological life on Earth throughout in order to inspire action from all those listening to his speech, hoping that this speech will be a turning point regarding the politics of this issue.

The first slide projected behind Professor Lee presents the title of the speech 'Taking Stock'. This title is a clever pun, as it could refer to both the scrutinisation of the dire situation of biodiversity or the use of animals for food and in farmlands. By using the double meaning of the word 'stock' in this way, Professor Lee is contending that humans have done little to halt the loss of biodiversity, due to the fact that they view animals as products or commodities, rather than part of a larger biological system that includes even humans. This idea is repeated in the image presented on the same slide, where elements of nature, such as animals, plants and humans seem to be coexisting peacefully and harmoniously. This image draws upon the idea of biodiversity, especially the interactions between plants, animals and humans, in order to say that human happiness is compatible with a healthy environment. In the final slide presented at the close of the presentation, there is an image of a world which is held in the palms of two human hands. This image projects the idea that humans are responsible for the fate of the world and that this fate is literally (in the case of the image) in our hands. The comparatively small depiction of our planet also invites the audience to view the world as vulnerable and easily influenced by human action for better or for worse. Underneath the image is a wise quote from famous ecologist Thomas Eisner 'Biodiversity is the greatest treasure we have... Its diminishment is to be prevented at all costs', which are also the final words of Professor Lee's speech. This quote sets out to remind the audience of the significance of biodiversity to our survival and that we cannot afford to lose it.

Professor Lee commences his speech by evaluating the current situation of biodiversity and outlining what humans have done since 2002 to prevent its loss. Despite 2010 being set out by the United Nations to be the year to emphasise 'the value of biodiversity in our lives' and 'to safeguard the variety of life on earth', Professor Lee admits with a 'tinge of sadness' there has been a lack of 'serious action' taken towards achieving this goal. The apparent contrast between the positive and negative value-laden words to describe the idealised goal that was set out and to summarise the current situation respectively serves to highlight how far humanity has fallen from achieving the goal. He also hopes to instil a sense of disappointment and regret in his audience. The rhetorical question 'Has this, in fact, been a year of action?' implores the listeners to look at the objective truth of the state of biodiversity loss and hints that the answer is a resounding no. The use of emotive words such as 'honest' and 'commitment' sets out to appeal to the intrinsic values in the audience such as their ethics in order to downplay the scientific nature of the issue and emphasise its moral implications. The assault of questions that Professor Lee asks his audience in the first half of his speech serves to impart guilt and a sense of responsibility in his audience for the current state of affairs.

In order to compound the seriousness of the situation, Professor Lee lists damning statistics of the loss of natural habitat: '35% of mangroves, 40% of forests and 50% of wetlands', in order to shock and alarm his audience, inspiring them to take action to prevent any further loss. The short but emotive and impactful statement 'It is too late for them' is intended to show that the loss of biodiversity is not

something intangible or non-existent, it is indeed a current and tangible issue since some species are extinct. As a result, this statement is intended to influence members of his audience to re-evaluate their commitment to reducing the loss of biodiversity. The continual use of inclusive language such as 'we' and 'our' serves to emphasise the fact that any attempt to reach this goal will require a collective effort from many nations in order to stop 'our own thoughtless actions'. The very actions that have led to the current dire situation are listed by Professor Lee, almost like a list of crimes presented in court: 'destruction of natural habitats, hunting, the spread of alien predators, disease and climate change' in order to reinforce the notion that humanity is guilty for causing these destructive current trends and, therefore, has an obligation to help reverse them.

The imperative statement 'We know this.' marks a slight tone change from a more reflective tone to a more passionate one. It also points to the fact that the issue of biodiversity loss is not an issue beyond our knowledge and control, but rather one of ignorance. Again, the repeated use of 'we' emphasises that a collective effort is required from those in the audience, whom he flatters as 'the most educated generation of any to date', in order to solve this 'grim situation'. The normally positive phrases 'wonderful words, glossy brochures, inspiring documentaries' are used satirically as a reference to the superficiality of the current campaign and implies that these methods must come to an end. In fact, the use of 'inspiring documentaries' most likely alludes to Al Gore's renowned *An Inconvenient Truth* and downplaying such a respected documentary further shows how serious an issue biodiversity loss has become. The alliterative phrase 'a talk-fest of targets' reinforces the fact that complacency has substituted 'concrete results' and this obvious contrast distances these awareness campaigns from real action, dismissing the notion that the former automatically leads to latter. As well as this, Professor Lee broadens the issue of the loss of biodiversity to affect humans on a global scale, showing that it could lead to 'rampant illnesses [and] deepening poverty'. This cause and effect relationship would appeal to the more logically-driven members of his audience, while also creating a concrete relationship between the issue of the loss of biodiversity and the issue of global poverty in the minds of the audience. By stating that 'the poor are particularly vulnerable', Professor Lee evokes sympathy from his audience for those who already endure hardship because of their unfortunate lifestyles. As his audience would likely come from privileged backgrounds, Professor Lee draws upon the moral obligation to help those less fortunate than themselves in his audience in order to convince them to adhere the commitment more stringently.

Professor Lee continues by expanding on how biodiversity would affect 'the food security, nutrition and health of the rural poor'. He associates words such as 'vulnerability' and 'dependence' that connotes victimization and helplessness in order to continue to evoke sympathy from the audience for those who live in poverty. The alarming and impactful statistic, 'More than 1.1 billion people remain in extreme poverty' shows how widespread this issue is and the national delegates would likely be eager to reduce this number by committing more strongly to the cause. The drastic description of the audience as 'powerful economic giants' as opposed to the poor shows that while the poor are indeed helpless, the national delegates are not and, therefore, must take action both on their own behalf, as well as on behalf of the poor. Professor Lee demonstrates his wit and intellect by using the exclusive term 'affluenza', referring to trends associated with consumerism. This term also alludes to the fact that consumerism is a disease, leading to the destruction of biodiversity. As a result, the audience are reminded that 'The time for talk is over.' in order to reinforce his tone of urgency and the direness of the situation. In accordance with the last slide, Professor ends his speech with words from famous ecologist, Thomas Eisner: 'Biodiversity is the greatest treasure we have...Its diminishment is to prevented at all costs'. This sagacious quote sums up his speech by both reasserting the importance of biodiversity and emphasises that the fact that we cannot afford to lose it.

Professor Lee is adamant that action must be taken immediate to halt the loss of biodiversity. His speech is largely dependent on the use of negative laden words to emphasise the current dire situation and to dismiss the effectiveness of any current practises. In addition to this, the repeated and effective use of short and impactful statements also assist in inspiring member of his audience, who are also national delegates, in order to take action and to commit to this cause.