Caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) caused by Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis (C. pseudotuberculosis) has been a significant disease of small ruminants in the majority of sheep rearing countries for over a century. Due to the chronic and often sub-clinical nature of the infection, it has proved difficult to control, and consequently prevalence is high in many parts of the world. This in turn, has impacted upon producers with respect to significant economic losses through chronic ill thrift, carcass condemnation and reduced wool quality and yields. It is estimated the economic losses to the Australian sheep industry equate to approximately AUD30 million annually. As a consequence, increased importance has been placed on control and preventative management practices to reduce the prevalence of the disease.

The objectives of this study were to estimate the prevalence of CLA in NSW Merino flocks; determine the range of current CLA preventative management practices and compare these with past practices; and establish the effectiveness of current preventative management practices and identify factors, which may have influenced levels of infection.

Approximately 300 sheep producers in NSW were randomly selected to participate from regions investigated in a previous study conducted in 2003. Organisations such as Livestock Health and Pest Authorities assisted in the selection of farms across the major sheep production areas in NSW. Questionnaires were mailed to the owner or manager of each farm comprising 30 questions about CLA prevalence, vaccination practices, producer knowledge, and management practices relating to CLA.

The responses from the questionnaire are currently being analysed in relation to the prevalence of CLA within each flock and the relationship between management factors and the effectiveness of the current vaccination program. These results will be available at the conference.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of current preventative management practices will be extremely useful in further refining the vaccination extension program. By further improving CLA preventative management practices, a reduction in the prevalence of CLA will reduce the economical losses of CLA on the sheep industry, benefiting both wool and meat industries.