
Consultation - Information requirements for prepackaged food sold online

11 December 2025



AUSTRALIAN
**FOOD &
GROCERY**
COUNCIL

CELEBRATING
30
YEARS
1995-2025

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Q1. I consent to the Department collecting the information requested in Citizen Space about me, including any sensitive information, for the purposes indicated above.

Yes, I consent.

Q2. Do you consent to your Submission being published on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's Consultation Hub website, and being accessible to the public, including persons overseas?

Yes - Publish response, including both my name and organisation's name.

Q3. What is your name?

Anne-Marie Mackintosh

Q4. What is your email address?

anne-marie.mackintosh@afgc.org.au

Q5. If we require further information regarding your submission, can we contact you?

Yes.

Q6. Are you answering on behalf of an organisation?

Yes.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) is the leading national organisation representing Australia's food, beverage and grocery manufacturing sector.

With an annual turnover in the 2023-24 financial year of \$173 billion, Australia's food and grocery manufacturing sector makes a substantial contribution to the Australian economy and is vital to the nation's future prosperity. Each business in the sector has contributed towards an industry-wide \$4.8 billion capital investment in 2023-24.

Food, beverage and grocery manufacturing together forms Australia's largest manufacturing sector, representing over 32% of total manufacturing turnover in Australia. The industry makes a large contribution to rural and regional Australia economies, with almost 36 per cent of its 294,000 employees being in rural and regional Australia.

It is essential to the economic and social development of Australia, and particularly rural and regional Australia, that the magnitude, significance and contribution of this industry is recognised and factored into the Government's economic, industrial and trade policies.

The industry has a clear view, outlined in *Sustaining Australia: Food and Grocery Manufacturing 2030*, of its role in the expansion of domestic manufacturing, jobs growth, higher exports and enhancing the sovereign capability of the entire sector.

This submission is provided on behalf of the AFGC and its members in response to the Food Regulation Standing Committee Consultation: Policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online.

While most prepackaged foods must carry mandatory labelling on-pack, there is no guidance on the information that should be available to support informed purchasing decisions when these products are sold online. To address this gap, the Food Regulation Standing Committee has drafted a policy guideline that outlines Food Ministers' expectations for online information requirements. Although not a regulatory instrument, the guideline provides direction for Food Standards Australia New Zealand when developing or reviewing food regulatory measures and will inform future work across the trans-Tasman system to ensure consumers can access the information they need when shopping for prepackaged foods online.

The AFGC and its members recognise the value of providing labelling information and support a clear framework for businesses to follow, ensuring consistency, and fairness across the sector.

Q7. What sector do you represent?

Industry.

Q8. Which country are you responding from?

Australia.

Q9. Have you read the Consultation Paper: Policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Yes.

Q10. Are you aware of any other relevant background information that should be considered?

The AFGC is aware of separate, but interconnected, work underway by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ)¹, the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC)², and Ministry for Primary Industries (New Zealand) (MPI NZ)³ in the digital food labelling space. The impetus being the growing online and cross-border grocery shopping, rising consumer demand for nutrition and ingredient information, and constraints of physical "on-pack" labelling.

These efforts contribute to the long-term regulatory roadmap endorsed by Ministers that includes "adoption of digital labelling and eCommerce standards" as a priority⁴. However, at present the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code remains oriented around physical labelling applied at retail sale.

In New Zealand, the MPI has launched a consultation (closing 19 Dec 2025) on a trial allowing digital labelling for certain imported pre-packaged foods sold in participating retail outlets. Under the proposal, certain imported foods (from "approved retailers") might be exempted — temporarily — from full on-pack compliance, if all required information is instead made available digitally (e.g., via QR code, shelf-edge

¹ FSANZ response to Australian Government productivity agenda (principles-based review of digital labelling). https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-08/HDA%20-%20FSANZ%20-%20Response%20Letter%20-%20Dr%20S%20Cuthbert_Redacted.pdf?mc_cid=39a4491ae6&mc_eid=e20eb9c063

² This consultation

³ NZ Ministry for Primary Industries proposal to enable a limited trial of digital labelling on certain imported food products. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/consultations/proposal-to-enable-a-limited-trial-of-digital-labelling-on-certain-imported-food-products>

⁴ Food Ministers' Meeting communiqué – 14 November 2025 <https://www.foodregulation.gov.au/food-ministers-meeting-communiqué-14-november-2025>

digital label, website or app). The trial aims to reduce cost and regulatory burden (particularly for new or smaller retailers), while still preserving access to key information (ingredients, allergens, nutritional info).

It is AFGC's opinion that the current public consultations in both Australia (online food sales guideline) and New Zealand (digital-labelling trial) will strongly influence how digital labelling is regulated and implemented. Whatever the outcome, harmonisation across jurisdictions is a key consideration. For trans-Tasman trade and for consistency of consumer experience, alignment of standards (e.g. QR-code format, info fields) across Australia and New Zealand is critical.

Q11. Do you agree with the problem as stated?

Problem statement:

Consumers shopping for food online that is required to bear a label in Australia and New Zealand do not have consistent access to the same information as those shopping at a physical store. This is inconsistent with guidance from Codex Alimentarius and may limit the ability of consumers to make safe and informed choices when shopping for these foods online. Consumers not having access to nutrition labelling information when shopping online was raised as a concern by submitters to FSANZ's 2025 call for information on nutrition labelling. There is no policy guideline in Australia or New Zealand on what information should be provided by sellers when food required to bear a label is sold online to inform FSANZ's consideration.

Yes. AFGC and its members agree with the problem as it is described.

Consumers currently shopping online do not have consistent access to the same information at point of sale as that required on the physical label. From an industry perspective, this inconsistency can also lead to reputational risks if consumers feel misled or lack confidence in online purchases.

AFGC recognises that other mandatory labelling elements—such as Country-of-Origin-Label information and weight declarations—remain important to consumers and can influence purchasing decisions yet sit under different legislative instruments.

We seek clarification on how these other mandatory labelling elements, which fall outside FSANZ's remit, will be treated in the policy development process and whether they will be managed separately from the information required by FSANZ.

Clear recognition and clear terms to describe this problem are essential for developing practical, consistent solutions across online retail platforms. For example, in Q11 information online is described as 'same information', as distinct from Q12 and Q15 that refer to "necessary information to make safe and informed purchasing decisions". The intent is about provision of information to support safe and informed purchasing decisions rather than replicating what is on a physical label. For example, date marking and lot identification details should be exempt, as these technical requirements are not practical to implement or maintain consistently within an online sales environment.

Q12. Do you agree with the desired outcome?

Desired outcome:

Clarity on the information Australia and New Zealand Food Ministers expect to be provided for online retail sale of food required to bear a label. Consumers purchasing food in an online retail environment should have access to necessary information to make safe and informed purchasing decisions. Generally, this includes the mandatory food labelling information. These outlined expectations will be considered by FSANZ to inform any future information requirements for food sold online in the trans-Tasman Food Regulation System.

Yes. The AFGC and its members agree with the policy's desired outcome i.e. clarity on what information needs to be provided for online sales, and access to information for consumers to help in purchasing decisions.

Industry supports the desired outcome if it provides a policy framework for greater clarity of compliance obligations, allows flexibility for implementation, and accounts for practical constraints such as platform design limitations and product update cycles.

Q13. Do you support developing a policy guideline for information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Yes. The AFGC and its members support the development of a policy guideline for information requirements for prepackaged foods in e-commerce channels as it provides a clear framework for businesses to follow, ensuring consistency, and fairness across the sector.

Additionally, it would help/support both domestic and international companies selling online in Australia and New Zealand understand their obligations and reduce risk of non-compliance.

In setting a clear framework for the provision of information for packaged food sold online, it is important that the policy guideline is not overly prescriptive for the breadth of information that could be displayed and to allow for innovation in how information is displayed while still meeting policy objectives; a co-regulatory approach is therefore preferred over prescriptive regulation.

Q14. Are you aware of any unintended consequences for developing a policy guideline for information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Yes. The AFGC and its members have identified potential unintended consequences that warrant consideration.

While data must be accurate, circumstances occur where e-commerce data updates may not reflect all changes in physical market data in real time:

- There may also be variations between online sites depending on when the retailer updates the information online. This raises the issue of who is ultimately responsible for the information provided online.
- It takes time for older stock (this also applies to long shelf-life products) to sell through after a product's physical label has been updated.
- When recipe updates or other label changes occur, it is common for two different pack formats to be in the market at the same time. Existing stock may remain on shelves until it is sold through, creating a transitional period where full alignment between online information and the physical product is not feasible.
- It is costly for small and medium businesses to update their product listings and keep online platforms up to date as uploading and inputting data information is a timely job for all of those involved in the management of data.
- The same product may be manufactured at different sites, resulting in slight variations (e.g. ingredients, NIP). This can make it challenging to ensure that online labelling accurately reflects the product a consumer will receive.
- Logistical challenges faced by retailers in ensuring information remains current, particularly as products, formulations, labels, and/or nutritional content change on an ad hoc basis.
- Transferring product information from manufacturers to retailers can vary. Platforms use different data fields, their IT systems do not always match, and the degree of information shown on retailers' platforms are dictated by the digital shelf platform. A practical solution could include allowing the display of products images provided the necessary information is legible.

Other issues:

- It is important that communication on these platforms encourages consumers to always check the physical label of the product before consumption, particularly if they have any medical or dietary concerns. For example, there are specific products under the Food Standards Code - Part 2.9 on Special Purpose Foods that are for use under medical supervision or indicate that a consumer should discuss options for a healthcare professional.
- Targeted engagement with e-commerce retailers, suppliers, and service providers will be important to ensure that any policy guidance translates into practical, workable, and effective solutions.

Q15. Do you agree with the proposed aim for the policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Aim:

The Australia New Zealand Food Ministers expect that consumers shopping for prepackaged food for retail sale online have access to necessary information to make safe and informed purchasing decisions.

Yes. The AFGC and its members agree and support this aim, provided that the policy guideline is developed in a way that is practical for a range of food businesses and retailers, including those with limited e-commerce capabilities. Implementation must be simple and practical, as this will be a significant change for food businesses and retailers. For some businesses, the shift may also be cost-prohibitive, with both upfront and ongoing costs that they will need to absorb.

From an industry perspective, consideration of the necessary information consumers actually need (noting that not all mandatory details such as batch numbers and date marking are useful to them) to make safe and informed purchasing decisions is critical to maintain their confidence and avoid confusion.

Q16. Do you agree with the proposed context for the policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Context:

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code outlines the labelling and information requirements for food for retail sale in Australia and New Zealand. Most prepackaged foods are required to bear a label with certain information. Certain statements, information, designs or representations are prohibited from being on the food label. This prohibition also applies to an advertisement for the food. Increasingly Australian and New Zealand consumers are buying food online. Unlike in physical retail environments, online consumers cannot assess the physical food product's packaging including the mandated food information on the label. This limits the effectiveness of food regulations intended to manage safety risks and encourage healthier, more informed consumer choices.

Yes. The AFGC and its members agree that the context reflects current market trends and regulatory gaps.

Industry recognises that more consumers are buying food online and cannot physically inspect labels at the point of sale. This makes it important to provide the necessary information online — information that is both practical and minimal — rather than simply replicating everything that is mandatory on the physical label, as not all mandatory details are useful for consumers when making purchasing decisions.

It also remains important for consumers to check the physical label when they receive the product to ensure it meets their expectations of purchased product, as there will be times when product labels are being updated and there could be old and new stock in the market. Likewise, there is an opportunity for communication on these platforms that encourages consumers to always check the physical product before consumption, particularly if they have any medical or dietary concerns.

Q17. Do you agree with the proposed scope for the policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Scope:

The policy guideline applies to food for retail sale required to bear a label in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code when these foods are offered for sale online and a consumer does not have access to a physical product at point-of-sale. This includes foods, beverages, alcoholic beverages and special purpose foods.

Yes. The AFGC and its members agree with the proposed scope.

Q18. Do you agree with the proposed overarching policy principles for the policy guideline on information requirements for prepackaged food sold online?

Overarching policy principles:

Consumers purchasing food in an online retail environment should have access to the necessary information at point-of-purchase to make safe and informed decisions.

Online retail environments are inherently different to physical retail environments, and information requirements may vary between them. Generally, information standards developed to manage food safety risks and promote healthy and informed choice should apply at point-of sale, regardless of where a consumer makes their food purchase.

Statements, information, designs or representations prohibited from being on a food label are prohibited online.

Yes. The AFGC and its members support the principles that:

- online consumers should have access to the same 'necessary' information as in-store shoppers,
- information standards should apply at point of sale, and
- prohibited statements or claims on a physical label should not appear online (noting that this is already a requirement).

The AFGC notes that many practical considerations will need to be addressed for the policy guidelines to be considered and implemented.

Q19. Should specific reference be made to providing the Health Star Rating information when present on the food label?

Specific policy principles:

"Foods sold online should bear a physical label with the mandatory information required in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code when delivered to the consumer."

FRSC wants to specifically seek your views on whether the guideline should encourage the display of the currently voluntary Health Star Rating information online when present on the label. The Health Star Rating is distinct to other voluntary labelling elements as this is actively encouraged to be provided by Food Ministers. However, Ministers may be considering whether to mandate the system soon if the final uptake target in November 2025 is not met".

Yes. The AFGC and its members support displaying the Health Star Rating (HSR) online where it already appears on the physical pack. If an online platform wishes to show an HSR for a product that does not

carry it on the physical packaging, the retailer/platform should seek permission and confirmation from the manufacturer before doing so.

For consideration is whether B2B products—sold exclusively through business channels—should display HSR, and if it is required or not in these instances.

AFGC acknowledges that the above considerations may change as Food Ministers are currently evaluating the potential to mandate the system in 2026.

Q20. Do you agree with the other proposed specific policy principles?

Yes. The AFGC and its members support the specific principles that information must be legible, accessible, available prior to purchase, and linked to the online product. Ensuring that physical labels are present when products are delivered aligns online practices with existing regulatory requirements and maintains consumer trust.

The reality is that products shown online may not always match the item a customer receives. During changeovers—such as updates to packaging or variations from different supply sources—there will be times where multiple versions of products are in the market, and it is not possible for industry to manage this seamlessly. The policy therefore needs to stay flexible to reflect how businesses operate in practice.

Industry supports flexibility in how necessary information is displayed digitally. Clear guidance and examples would assist businesses in implementing these principles consistently.

Q21. Do you have any other feedback on the proposed policy guidelines?

No.

Q22. Please provide any other comments or points for consideration that may not have been addressed in this consultation.

For future consideration, it may be appropriate to clarify the responsibilities of both parties regarding data compliance. Manufacturers could be expected to provide all mandatory information and associated visuals to online retailers, while platform owners would remain accountable for ensuring full compliance with applicable regulations, ensuring that any online display aligns accurately with the information provided.



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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

2023-24



The figures on this page exclude the fresh food sector and are based on 2023-24 ABS data.

1: This is total number of employees, head count basis and does not include seasonal employees.

2: Gross fixed capital formation for food, beverage and tobacco manufacturing subsector is taken as indicator of capital investment.