



APPLICATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

April 2026

TO:

Food Standards Australia New Zealand

IN RELATION TO:

Application to amend *Schedule 25 – Permitted Novel Foods* of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

Extension of use for phytosterols, phytostanols and their esters in yoghurt, cheese and processed cheese products.



This application, submitted by Bega Cheese Limited (Bega Group), seeks to amend provisions within the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code) to extend and harmonise permissions for the use of phytosterols, phytostanols and their esters (collectively referred to as plant sterols) in yoghurt, cheese and processed cheese products.

The application proposes amendments to:

- Standard 2.5.3 – Fermented milk products; and
- Standard 2.5.4 – Cheese,

to enable broader and more consistent use of plant sterols across dairy categories.

Specifically, the application requests:

- removal of the current 200 g pack size restriction for yoghurt and introduction of a compositional permission expressed per 100 g (0.6–1.4 g plant sterol equivalents per 100 g);
- expansion of permitted sterol forms in cheese and processed cheese to include all plant sterol equivalents (not limited to tall oil phytosterol esters); and
- replacement of the current absolute fat limit for cheese with a relative requirement of at least 25% less fat than standard full-fat cheese.

These amendments are intended to improve regulatory consistency within the Code and align with international regulatory approaches, while maintaining existing safety and labelling requirements.

Public Health and Nutrition Context

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains a leading cause of death and disease burden in Australia. National data indicate 30.2% of Australian adults had abnormally high total cholesterol, and a further 17.8% having close to abnormally high total cholesterol. More specifically, 27.8% of adults had abnormally high LDL cholesterol, with a further 19% being close to abnormally high (ABS, 2025).

Plant sterols are well established as effective dietary components for lowering LDL cholesterol, with a daily intake of 2–3 g associated with reductions of approximately 10%. Their efficacy is recognised within the Code through existing permitted high-level health claims.

The proposed amendments aim to facilitate improved consumer access to efficacious intakes of plant sterols through commonly consumed dairy foods, thereby supporting dietary strategies for cholesterol reduction and cardiovascular health.

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Rationale for the Proposed Change

While plant sterols are already permitted in several food categories in the Code, current restrictions in yoghurt and cheese limit their effective delivery. In particular:

- yoghurt permissions are constrained by pack size and per-pack dosing, which do not reflect typical consumption patterns; and
- cheese permissions are restricted to a single sterol form and impose compositional constraints that limit product development.

These inconsistencies create barriers to innovation and reduce the practicality of delivering recommended daily intakes of plant sterols through dairy products.

The proposed amendments would:

- enable delivery of efficacious plant sterol doses in realistic serving formats;
- improve consumer convenience and choice;
- support product innovation; and
- harmonise regulatory permissions across food categories and international jurisdictions.
- Safety and Risk Assessment

Plant sterols are an established novel food ingredient in the Code with a long history of safe use. FSANZ has previously concluded that there are no toxicological concerns associated with their consumption at permitted levels and that available data provide a high level of confidence in their safety for the general population.

A review of literature published since the most recent FSANZ assessment (2022) did not identify any new evidence that would alter this conclusion.

Existing risk management measures, including mandatory advisory labelling and conditions for health claims, will continue to apply and are considered sufficient to ensure appropriate use and consumer understanding.

The Applicant has not identified any disadvantages of the proposed change.

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Dietary Exposure and Consumer Use

Current evidence indicates that population intake of plant sterols from fortified foods is generally below recommended levels. The availability of additional food vehicles is therefore expected to increase the likelihood of consumers achieving efficacious intakes without increasing the risk of excessive consumption.

Yoghurt and cheese are widely consumed core dairy foods and represent suitable delivery matrices due to their composition, consumption frequency, and compatibility with plant sterols.

Regulatory Impact and Trade Considerations

The proposed amendments are voluntary and do not impose additional regulatory burden on industry or government. Costs are limited to those associated with product development and compliance for manufacturers who choose to utilise the permission.

Approval would improve alignment with international standards, including those in the European Union, Canada and the United States, where plant sterols are permitted in a broader range of food categories. This alignment is expected to:

- reduce regulatory divergence;
- support innovation; and
- enhance international competitiveness of the Australian and New Zealand food industry.
- Conclusion

This application seeks to extend the use of an already approved and well-characterised novel food ingredient to additional dairy formats in a manner that is consistent with existing safety assessments, labelling requirements and policy principles.

The proposed amendments are expected to:

- support public health objectives by facilitating cholesterol reduction;
- improve consumer access and choice;
- enable innovation in functional dairy products; and
- enhance regulatory consistency domestically and internationally.

On this basis, the applicant considers that the proposed changes meet the objectives of the FSANZ Act, including the protection of public health and safety, the provision of adequate information to consumers, and the promotion of an efficient and internationally competitive food industry.

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