It is important to understand the difference between ‘Use By’ and ‘Best Before’ date marking of food.

‘Use By’ and ‘Best Before’ dates

‘Use By’ and ‘Best Before’ dates are compulsory forms of date marking under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). Unless specifically exempt under the Code, all packaged food with a shelf life of 2 years or less must have a date mark.

The Queensland Health Label Buster guide sets out the situations in which certain labelling provisions (including date marks) are not required.

What’s the difference?

‘Use By’ - used for food that must be consumed before a certain date for health and safety reasons.

‘Best Before’ - used for shelf-stable foods such as biscuits and confectionery, frozen foods, most raw foods that will be cooked before being eaten (e.g. meat, chicken, fish) or foods that will noticeably spoil before becoming a safety issue.

Other forms of date marking

Bread with a shelf life of less than 7 days may use the following forms of date mark instead of a ‘Best Before’ date:

- ‘Baked On’ or ‘Bkd on’ date - the date on which the bread was baked.
- ‘Baked For’ or ‘Bkd for’ date - a date not more than 12 hours after the time the bread was baked.

Further information on labelling and composition for the baking industry is available from the Queensland Health fact sheet Bread and Bakery Products.

Can food be sold after the ‘Use By’ or ‘Best Before’ date?

‘Use By’ date – No.

Foods labelled with a ‘Use By’ date cannot be sold after that date has passed. This also includes food that is being given away.

‘Best Before’ date – Yes.

Food marked with a ‘Best Before’ date can still be sold after the expiry of that date, provided it is safe and suitable for consumption.

If consumers are unsure about the shelf life or date marking of a food, they should contact the supplier or manufacturer for more information.
Can a food business change the ‘Use By’ or ‘Best Before’ date on food?

No.

Information on a food label can only be changed with the permission of the relevant authority, which in Queensland, is Queensland Health. A food business will need to contact the local Queensland Health Public Health Unit to make an application to alter a food label.

A business that applies for permission to change a date mark must provide sufficient information or evidence to enable Queensland Health to determine that the food will remain safe and suitable until the new date proposed for the date mark.

Storage conditions

Food labels with a date mark must also include a statement of any specific storage conditions required to ensure that the food will keep for the period indicated by the ‘Use By’ or ‘Best Before’ date.

For further information

Further information on date marking and all other food labelling requirements can be found in the Queensland Health Label Buster guide. The Queensland Department of Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. These can be accessed at [www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety).

If you have any further questions regarding date marking contact your local Public Health Unit. Contact details for Public Health Units can be found at [www.health.qld.gov.au/cho](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/cho).