



Freshcare

Food Safety & Quality Standard –
Edition 5 (2026)

PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Where to provide feedback:

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Before: 29 October 2026 at midnight CET



Freshcare

Food Safety & Quality Standard –
Edition 5 (2026)



GFSI Benchmark Assessment Report

Application information

Assessment team and date

Certification programme Name(s)	Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Standard – Edition 5 (2026)
Certification programme owner name and address	Freshcare Limited Customs House Sydney Level 3, 31 Alfred Street Sydney NSW 2000 Australia
Certification programme owner name, email, contact number	Freshcare courtney.medutis@freshcare.com.au +61 2 8039 9999
Date of previous application if applicable	N/A
Benchmark Leader name and contact details	Karen Betts
GFSI Senior Technical Manager name	Karla Mijatovic
Observers name	Karla Mijatovic
Interpreter's name (if applicable)	N/A
Date of this office assessment	28-30 th July 2026
Language (e.g. English or other)	English

Scopes including in this application

GFSI Scopes		Scopes applied for
AI	Farming of Animals for Meat/ Milk/ Eggs/ Honey	
All	Farming of Fish and Seafood	
BI	Farming of Plants (other than grains and pulses)	
BII	Farming of Grains and Pulses	
BIII	Pre-process Handling of plant products	
C0	Animal Conversion	
CI	Processing of perishable animal products	
CII	Processing of Plant Perishable Products	
CIII	Processing of Animal and Plant Perishable Products (Mixed Products)	
CIV	Processing of Ambient Stable Products	
D	Production of Feed	
E	Catering	
FI	Retail / Wholesale	
FII	Food Broker / Agent	
H	Provision of Food Safety Services	
G	Provision of Storage and Distribution Services	
I	Production of Food Packaging	
JI	Hygienic Design of Food Buildings and Processing Equipment (for building constructors and equipment manufacturers)	
JII	Hygienic Design of Food Buildings and Processing Equipment (for building and equipment users)	
K	Production of (Bio) Chemicals (Additives, Vitamins, Minerals, Bio-cultures, Flavourings, Enzymes and Processing aids)	

Executive summary

Overview of the Assessment Process

Freshcare applied for recognition against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements (BMR) Version 2024 for scopes BI, BIII, FI, FII and G. The benchmarking process was conducted as an integrated assessment to ensure a seamless transition from v2020.1 to v2024.

The purpose of the GFSI assessment was to evaluate Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Standard – Edition 5 (2026), issued by the CPO, in compliance with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements 2024 version.

Desktop Review & Technical Verification

The benchmarking cycle commenced with a comprehensive preliminary Desktop Review of the Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Standard – Edition 5 (2026), completed remotely by the BML (Benchmark Leader) Karen Betts (KLB) in July and August 2026, and was based on the review of the evidence provided by the Certification Programme Owner in the self-assessment excel files for the GFSI benchmarking requirements parts II and III to cover the scope of recognition applied i.e. BI, BIII, FI, FII and G, ensuring that it contained sufficient objective evidence to proceed to the onsite assessment phase.

All findings raised, concerning the request of additional information and disagreements with the self-assessment of CPO, have been communicated in writing and discussed with the CPO during the review call on 28th July 2026 and subsequently the Office Visit on 28th, 29th and 30th July 2026.

Office Visit and Findings

An Office Visit (OV) was conducted on 28th, 29th and 30th July 2026, by Benchmark Leader KLB. The assessment identified four non-conformities related to details within the risk basis of certification body office audits (requirement 3.13), clarity of scope of the new FSQ5 programme (requirement 5.1), specifying identification of unannounced audits within reports (requirement 5.7) and lack of defined timeline to provide completed audit report to audited organisations (requirement 5.13).

No critical findings or other impeding factors were raised. The office assessment was carried out remotely on 28th, 29th and 30th July by the GFSI BML (KB) and achieved the main purpose to verify the implementation and alignment of the new requirements and the Certification Programme Owner's Integrity Programme through sampled record reviews.

Validation of Corrective Actions (20th August 2026)

Following the Office Visit, the CPO submitted a formal Corrective Action and Preventive Action (CAPA) plan. The GFSI Senior Technical Manager Karla Mijatovic conducted a final technical validation of these actions on 20th August 2026. This validation included:

Verification of Root Cause Analysis (RCA): Ensuring the CPO identified the underlying procedural gaps rather than just implementing superficial fixes.

Validation of Evidence: Review of updated OP63 Certification Body Monitoring Procedure; Draft Freshcare Rules- update to 6.3, addition of 5.3.14 and 5.2.4; CB Criteria V4- update to section 7.5

Final Approval: The Senior Technical Manager officially accepted the close-out of all findings, confirming that the Freshcare system is now in full conformity with BMR v2024.

Conclusion

The benchmarking process encountered no significant complexities that would impede recognition. The Senior Technical Manager concludes that the assessment was transparent, evidence-based, and compliant with GFSI protocols. The report is now deemed validated for the 4-week public stakeholder consultation.

Recommendation to the GFSI Steering Committee

Results of assessment and office visit

Time and location details

	Location	People present GFSI, consultant, CPO. Names and roles	Date and time
Self-assessment review	Remote	Karen Betts	July and August 2026
Review calls	Remote	Karen Betts Courtney Medutis Angela Steain	28 th July 2026
Office visit	Remote	Karen Betts Courtney Medutis Angela Steain Karla Mijatovic (observer)	28 th , 29 th and 30 th July 2026

Overview of Certification Programme

Established in 2000, Freshcare is an Australian-owned and operated company providing internationally recognised assurance standards for the fresh produce and winegrape industries.

As a purpose-driven organisation, Freshcare is funded through participation, with all proceeds going back into the research, development, and science to assure continuous consumer safety and environmental stewardship.

Supported by user-friendly resources and training, Freshcare standards help Australian producers demonstrate their capacity to grow, pack, and distribute safe, sustainable, quality produce for customers and consumers worldwide.

Freshcare offers a number of certification programmes with Food Safety & Quality Standard as GFSI recognised. Edition 5 was published in September 2026 with audits against the programme from March 2027.

Freshcare has over 3000 GFSI recognised certifications across Australia delivered by a number of approved Certification Bodies. Details are available on their website www.Freshcare.com.au

General compliance, strengths and weaknesses

The Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Standard – Edition 5 (2026) has been reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with GFSI BMR v2024 by technically competent industry representatives through structured working groups to draft and review the Standard documents. The documents had input from their Technical Steering Committee and stakeholder reference group with publication ratified by their Board and CEO. Representatives listed on their website www.freshcare.com.au/technical-steering-committee-2024.

The program has strong communications with their two Accreditation Bodies and currently seven approved Certification Bodies.

The review of the self-assessment documents and corresponding submitted evidence was carried out by the Benchmark Leader before concerns were discussed and clarified prior to the remote office visit on 28th, 29th and 30th July.

During the office visit, the Benchmark Leader interviewed the Certification Programme managers, reviewed documents, performance data and sampled certification records. The Integrity programme process was discussed and evaluated.

A total of four “partial” findings against the benchmark requirements part II were raised during the whole assessment (documental and office review), which related to details within the risk basis of certification body office audits (requirement 3.13), clarity of scope of the new FSQ5 programme (requirement 5.1), specifying identification of unannounced audits within reports (requirement 5.7) and lack of defined timeline to provide completed audit report to audited organisations (requirement 5.13).

The main points of strength on the management of the Certification Programme are:

- CPO has listened to market feedback and developed a simplified Programme involving industry experts.
- A small mature technical team has close oversight of Certification Body work.
- Regular communication with a small number of certification bodies, Accreditation Body, and stakeholders.

No particular points of weakness have been recognised in the management of the Certification Programme.

Four deficiencies raised regarding the GFSI requirements have been highlighted as partial non-conformities and promptly and fully addressed by the CPO.

Changes made to the certification programme following the GFSI assessment

The CPO Freshcare, following the GFSI assessment, has supplied the corrective action plan containing the revised requirements.

Several procedures and rules were updated including OP63 Certification Body Monitoring Procedure; Draft Freshcare Rules- update to 6.3, addition of 5.3.14 and 5.2.4; CB Criteria V4- update to section 7.5



The corrective action plan with evidence of procedural updates was received on 13th August 2026 and reviewed 14th August. This was considered adequate to address the findings.

List of findings

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
3.13	There is a comprehensive risk based system defined in OP63, however it does not consider food safety product recalls. Noted that historically Freshcare have had few or none reported recalls	Partly	OP63 updated: Strengthened risk-based Certification Body monitoring framework. Updates included the addition of product recalls and food safety incidents as risk considerations. These factors are now considered when determining monitoring activities, oversight frequency, verification requirements and escalation actions under this procedure. Evidence Provided: OP63 Certification Body Monitoring Procedure- Section 4, Risk Context.	Accepted for close out KLB 14.8.2026	Accepted. Procedure OP63 was updated to align with the clause by incorporating food safety incidents and product recalls as risk factors, bringing it into full alignment with the BMR 2024 risk-based programme. Validated by KM 01.Sept.2026
5.1	Whilst Freshcare Rules section 6.3 outlines scope specific to premises it does not adequately cover those without premises eg brokers ensuring that scope of	Partly	The Freshcare Rules were updated to explicitly recognise non-production business activities within certification scope requirements, ensuring scope requirements are consistently applied	Accepted for close out KLB 14.8.2026	Accepted. The CPO has provided the necessary

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
	certification is adequately clear for FSQ5		across all FSQ certification models. Future reviews of the Rules and Scope Guide will verify continued alignment between certification scope definitions and approved Freshcare activities. Evidence Provided: Draft Freshcare Rules- Update to 6.3.png- Section 6.3 Sites and Operations of the Freshcare Rules was updated to explicitly include: "business premises associated with non-production activities, including brokers, agents, marketing groups, wholesalers and provedores"		framework under the Freshcare rules for Certification Bodies to accurately clarify and document the scope of audits for the specific business types. The finding is effectively addressed and formally closed. Validated by KM 01.Sept.2026
5.7	Certification Body Criteria Section 7.7 outlines requirements for certificates, however no evidence could be presented to ensure rules cover identifying	Partly	The Certification Body Criteria were updated within Section 7.5 Audit Process to explicitly require audit reports to record the audit type, as defined in	Accepted for close out KLB 14.8.2026	Accepted. The revised procedures specify certification body criteria and require

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
	announced/unannounced in audit reports.		Freshcare Rules 5.3.2. The Criteria were also updated to state: "Where an audit is conducted as an unannounced audit, the audit report shall clearly identify the audit as an Unannounced Audit." Freshcare will continue to review scheme requirements, templates, FreshcareOnline fields and normative documents through its document review and change management processes to ensure documented requirements remain aligned with operational implementation. Evidence Provided: Draft CB Criteria V4- update to section 7.5.png		audit reports to explicitly state whether an audit was unannounced. The submitted evidence fully aligns with the BMR 2024 requirements. Validated by KM 01.Sept.2026

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
5.13	Whilst initial audit reports are required to be uploaded to Freshcare online within 14 days, no defined timeline is given for the provision of final audit reports.	partly	KPI 7 was updated from Audit Upload Timeliness to Certification Process Timeliness. The revised KPI now measures both timeliness of audit upload to FreshcareOnline following audit completion; and Timeliness of final audit report and certificate issue following receipt and acceptance of corrective action evidence. The revised arrangements ensure that Freshcare monitors the complete certification process timeline. Certification Bodies are now measured against defined timelines for progression from audit completion through corrective action review to final report and certificate issuance, providing objective assurance that certification activities are completed within established timeframes	Accepted for close out KLB 14.8.2026	Accepted. The updated documentation and implementation evidence regarding certification process timelines fully satisfy the requirements of Element 5.13. Consequently, the scheme is in full alignment with the BMR 2024 requirements. Validated by KM 01.Sept.2026

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
			and addressing the requirements of Element 5.13. Evidence Provided: OP63 Certification Body Monitoring Procedure- KPI 7 renamed from Audit Upload Timeliness to Certification Process Timeliness. TP27 Freshcare CB KPI Template.xlsx KPI 7 revised from "Audit Upload Timeliness" to "Certification Process Timeliness". Defined certification processing timelines established. Email to CBs KPI Update.png Draft Freshcare Rules- Addition of 5.3.14.png - Audit Report to document the requirements for final report to be provided to the participant		

Element reference	Non-conformity	Partly / no	Corrective action	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Senior Technical Manager
			Draft Freshcare Rules- Update to 5.2.4.png- timeline added for certificate issue.		

Root Cause Analysis (RCA) Summary

Finding 1: 3.13 There is a comprehensive risk based system defined in OP63, however it does not consider food safety product recalls. Noted that historically Freshcare have had few or none reported recalls

Root Cause: The Certification Body monitoring framework was developed using historical scheme performance data and primarily focused on certification delivery, audit performance and certification integrity indicators. Due to the historically low occurrence of product recalls and reportable food safety incidents within the Freshcare Scheme, these factors were considered operationally but were not explicitly incorporated into the documented risk assessment methodology. As a result, the documented procedure did not fully reflect all risk factors required under the GFSI BMR 2024 risk-based monitoring framework.

Finding 2: 5.1 Whilst Freshcare Rules section 6.3 outlines scope specific to premises it does not adequately cover those without premises eg brokers ensuring that scope of certification is adequately clear for FSQ5

Root Cause: The Freshcare Certification Scope Guide was developed to define certification scopes, including supply chain activities such as brokers, agents, marketing groups, wholesalers and provedores. As these activities were comprehensively described within the Scope Guide, the need to explicitly reference non-production business premises within the Freshcare Rules was overlooked during development.

Finding 3: 5.7 Certification Body Criteria Section 7.7 outlines requirements for certificates, however no evidence could be presented to ensure rules cover identifying announced/unannounced in audit reports.

Root Cause: Requirements for unannounced audits are implemented through operational controls including audit templates and mandatory certification database fields. As these controls were already established, the need to explicitly reference the requirement within the Certification Body Criteria was not identified during document development and review.

Finding 4: 5.13 Whilst initial audit reports are required to be uploaded to Freshcare online within 14 days, no defined timeline is given for the provision of final audit reports.

Root Cause: No distinction had been made between the initial audit report and the final audit report. The established monitoring focused on the initial audit report and was considered sufficient to satisfy BMR 5.13. As a result, the need for a documented timeline for the provision of final audit reports was not identified, creating a gap in the documented certification process requirements.

RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

List of findings – public stakeholder consultation

GFSI Benchmarking Requirements version 2024		Stakeholder Consultation Comments	CPO Answer	Recommendation from Benchmark Leader	Decision from GFSI Technical Manager