BC Small Businesses Want Action on Tariffs, Not Signals

New survey shows dissatisfaction with provincial tariff response, intensifying concern as promised tariff plan remains outstanding

For immediate release
February 2, 2026

Vancouver, BC – British Columbia's small businesses are navigating a period of continued and disruptive trade turbulence, marked by ongoing tariff uncertainty and the absence of clear Provincial government direction. A new survey of small businesses across the province shows nearly half of respondents are dissatisfied with the provincial government's response to tariffs, as businesses continue to wait for a long-promised tariff-response strategy that has yet to be released.

The survey, conducted by the Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC), underscores a growing gap between government signalling and what small businesses say they urgently need on the ground.

According to the findings, almost 50 per cent of businesses say they are dissatisfied with the province's response to tariffs, while only a minority believe current efforts are delivering meaningful relief. Many businesses continue to report challenges related to sourcing, rising costs, and ongoing supply-chain uncertainty. We acknowledge the province has signed some narrow-focused agreements - however, broad arrangements that encourage free trade and standardized processes across borders remain elusive.

"Tariff anxiety hasn't gone away," said Jeremy Heighton, President of BIABC. "Small businesses were told a tariff-response plan was coming. Months later, they're still waiting, and that uncertainty is now adding pressure at a time when margins are already thin."

The survey shows businesses are clear about the actions they want prioritized. An overwhelming 90 per cent of respondents say the province should take concrete steps to remove interprovincial trade barriers, identifying domestic market access as one of the fastest and most practical ways to reduce reliance on US supply chains. More than 57 per cent want an expansion of Buy BC and Shop Local initiatives, reflecting strong support for policies that strengthen local and Canadian sourcing.

The province recently announced it has signed the Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement (CMRA) as part of its broader trade response. BIABC says the CMRA could be especially valuable for local makers, manufacturers, and independent retailers who

often lack the administrative resources larger companies take for granted. So, while the agreement is a positive step, BIABC will be watching closely to ensure it lives up to its potential.

Food and alcohol are currently excluded from the agreement, reflecting their added regulatory complexity; however, BIABC hopes to see further work toward their inclusion over time.

The survey also highlights a structural challenge: 85 per cent of respondents employ fewer than 10 people, meaning many are excluded from federal tariff-response programs and lack the administrative capacity to navigate complex application, reporting, and support processes. BIABC says this makes it essential that any provincial response be simple, accessible, and designed with small operators in mind.

BIABC remains ready to work collaboratively with the province to ensure tariff and trade initiatives translate into real, near-term benefits for small businesses - not just good intentions.

The survey of 260 businesses was conducted in late November 2025, confirming that the impact of US tariffs will remain a key area of advocacy for BIABC.

About BIABC

The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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