

《China charting a new course》

China announced plans on Tuesday to help ships under its flag navigate the Arctic via a Northwest Passage route that will be 30 percent shorter than the ocean passages traditionally used to connect the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Panama Canal.

Global warming has made the northwest route more navigable. Guidance from China's Maritime Safety Administration, released on April 5, offers elaborate information on the route, which follows the northern coast of North America via waterways through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. The information includes nautical charts and sea ice situations.

"once this route is commonly used, it will directly change global maritime transportation and have a profound influence on international trade, the world economy, capital flow and resource exploitation," said Liu Pengfei, the ministry's spokesman, at a news briefing.

only one cargo ship, the Canadian vessel Nunavik, has made a solo voyage through the Northwest Passage, but "there will be ships with Chinese flags sailing through this route in the future," Liu said, without giving a specific time frame. He said the 356-page, Chinese-language guide will be very informative.

Wu Yuxiao, senior official at the maritime administration who helped write the guide, said the route will lower transportation costs and be strategically important to China.

"Many countries have noticed the financial and strategic value of Arctic Ocean passages," he said. "China has also paid much attention."

In 2014, the administration offered guidance on Arctic navigation of the Northeast route, which crosses the Arctic following the coasts of Russia and Norway.

Despite the economic value of sailing through the Arctic, Wu said it poses many risks, including the potential for shipwrecks caused by ice and possible damage to the fragile Arctic ecosystem. He said the lack of support infrastructure and an unstable climate also lower the efficiency of Arctic transportation.

"But as sea ice has declined due to global warming, Arctic navigation has increasing possibilities. That's why we need guidance for ships with the Chinese flag," Wu said.

According to the ministry, Chinese-language guidance on navigating such major passages as the Antarctic, the Strait of Malacca and the Suez and Panama canals, also will be released.