Last week, the International Maritime Organization adopted the proposed Polar Code, a set of international shipping regulations covering safety, environmental protections and navigation in polar waters around the world.

But while many applaud the adoption of controversial actions such as limiting the discharge of oily wastewater as well as untreated garbage from vessels, others say the code doesn't go far enough to protect polar environments subject to increased shipping activity, such as is being seen across the Northwest Passage over Canada and in waters bordering Russia.

The Friends of the Earth said in a release this week, that while the code will contain regulations requiring ship operators limited entry into ice according to their ship's ability to resist ice pressure, it does not require that ships be ice strengthened, and ice conditions information may not be readily available during a vessel's voyage in remote regions.

"The Polar Code doesn't do nearly enough to tackle substantial risks posed by shipping: use of noxious heavy fuel oil in the Arctic, vessels operating with inadequate ice-strengthening and structural stability, and disturbances of wildlife, to name a few," said John Kaltenstein, marine policy analyst with Friends of the Earth. "The IMO and industry seem content to dismiss or put off discussion on issues that really matter — that would truly diminish shipping's impacts on the sensitive Arctic environment and the region's residents."

Sian Prior, shipping advisor to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, said in a release that the code falls short of requirements that would adequately protect polar waters, such as requirements that ships are adequately strengthened and stabilized for dealing with ice collisions, that they report their position on a regular basis to a centralized system and that they be routed away from sensitive wildlife habitat.

Others pointed out that Arctic communities depend much more heavily on the ocean because of their subsistence hunting and fishing activities. Environmental organizations lobbied for a ban on heavy fuel use in Arctic waters as is in place in Antarctica.

"Arctic communities are especially dependent on marine resources for food," said Sue Libenson, of the Pacific Environment. "While the Polar Code is a good step at recognizing the special risks of Arctic shipping, it still fails to directly address the highest potential risk of a heavy fuel oil spill."

The Polar Code is expected to begin implementation on Jan. 1, 2017. More information on the code can be found at http://www.imo.org/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Pages/default.aspx