



# Panama Canal restrictions set to ease as rains roll in

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Panama Canal Authority

Weather forecasts have plenty of rain heading Panama's way with many in international shipping predicting that the worst has now passed for a chokepoint that has been badly affected by drought for the past 11 months.

*Splash* has been reporting on the Panama Canal Authority's (ACP) decision to slash daily transits and draft levels since May last year. The persistent drought, made all the

more worse by the El Niño weather phenomenon, saw a huge swathe of the global merchant fleet decide to avoid the waterway over the long queues and high toll fees. This was then compounded late last year when for the first time in shipping history, the Suez Canal became dangerous territory thanks to the Houthis from Yemen targeting merchant ships in and around the Red Sea in a campaign designed to bring pressure for a solution in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. Three weeks ago the ACP added three extra slots per day at its panamax locks, taking the total daily maximum transits to 27, still more than 10 shy of the waterway's normal maximum, but a sign that the worst was over.

Danish liner giant Maersk gave its own indication of the improving water levels along the canal today, announcing the reinstatement of a service that had previously switched to a rail land transit across the Central American country at the height of the drought crisis.

"As we approach the rainy season, the Panama Canal Authority recently introduced additional transit slots per day," Maersk stated in an advisory. "After closely monitoring the development over the past weeks, we are pleased to announce that Maersk will reinstate the Panama Canal transit on our OC1 service effective May 10th, 2024."

Restrictions on transits through the Panama Canal, which accounts for 2.5% of global trade, have seen tonnage transits down by a third, according to data from Clarksons Research.

There are currently 46 ships waiting to transit the canal, down from a peak of more than 160 last August.

Latest projections from ACP show projected water depths at Gatun Lake, the vital piece of water in the middle of the canal, will start to climb rapidly towards the end of May as the rainy season kicks in.