

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**  
*(Criminal Jurisdiction)*

**Criminal**  
**Case No. 25/3214 SC/CRML**

**PUBLIC PROSECUTOR**

**v**

**JOEL ROVU**

*Date of Plea:* 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025  
*Before:* Justice Josaia Naigulevu  
*Counsels:* Public Prosecutor – Ms. Josephine Tete  
Public Solicitor – Ms. Barbara Taleo

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**SENTENCE**

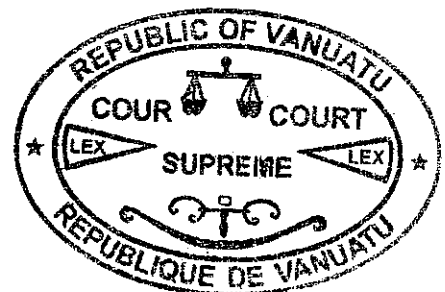
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**Introduction**

1. Joel Rovu, you pleaded guilty and accepted the summary of facts presented by the prosecution relating to one count of unlawful possession of cannabis substance contrary to section 2 (62) of the Dangerous Drugs Act [Cap 12] when you were arraigned on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025.
2. You were duly convicted on your plea.

**Facts**

3. Whilst on a patrol along the Second Canal Area on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2025, the police observed how you walked to the back of your parked taxi and threw something that you had been holding onto the ground. They stopped and searched the area, and found what they suspected to be alit rolled cannabis joint. They searched your taxi and found an aluminium foil package containing three more joints.
4. A test of the seized substance was conducted on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025. The substance, that weighed 2.0 grams proved positive for cannabis.



## Statutory Maximum Sentence

5. A conviction of Unlawful possession of cannabis contrary to section 2 (62) of the Dangerous Drugs Act attracts a fine not exceeding VT100, million or a term of imprisonment not exceeding 20 years, or both, such fine and imprisonment.

## Sentencing purpose and Guideline

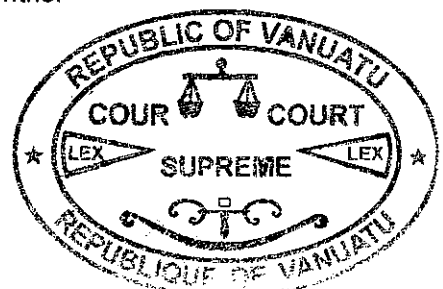
6. There are several principles that guide the sentence to be imposed on you. They include the proposition that you must be held accountable and must take responsibility for your action. Additionally, your action is the kind that is denounced by society, and that similar future acts by you and others must be deterred.
7. Equally important is that you must be given ample opportunity to rehabilitate and reintegrate.
8. The approach taken in the present case follows the guidance given by the Court of Appeal in the case *Philip v Public Prosecutor* [2020] VUCA 40.

## Aggravating Factors

9. The following circumstances constitute the aggravating factors in the present case:
  - a) You actively attempted to conceal the evidence of your wrongdoing when you saw the police approaching you in their vehicle;
  - b) Further 'joints' were found in your parked vehicle;

## Starting Point

10. In assessing the appropriate starting point, I have taken into account the statutory maximum sentence, as well as the aggravating and mitigating factors of the offending.
11. I have considered the submissions of counsel as well as the authorities they have referred to, for the Court's consideration. Your counsel and the prosecutor both recommend a starting point of between six (6) to ten (10) months.
12. I adopt a starting point of 9 months in this case.



## Guilty Plea

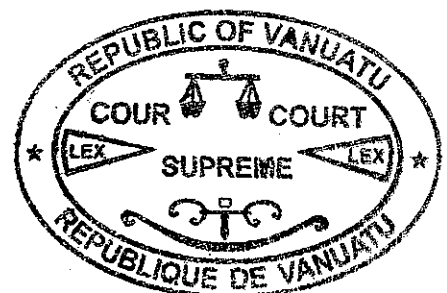
13. You entered a plea of guilty in this Court at the earliest opportunity. It indicates you have accepted responsibility for your wrong doing. I reduce your sentence by 30% from the starting point.

## Mitigating and Personal Factors

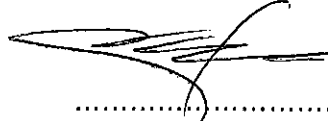
14. You are 38 years old and live with your partner Isa Joke in the Sakarata area.
15. You continue to attend and support your three children who now live with your estranged wife.
16. You are employed by Sedrack Wilson's construction and supplement your income by doing gardening.
17. You are treated, for the purpose of this case, as a first offender. Despite your honest admission, there is no record of any past wrongdoing with the Court in or the Correction services.
18. You are remorseful and have genuinely tried to go to church but have been discouraged by the attitude of the church members. You must not be discouraged and continue to attend.
19. These factors reduce your sentence by a further 4 months.

## End Sentence

20. As an end sentence, I impose on you a term of 2 months imprisonment.
21. Given the circumstances of your offending and your character, I agree with counsels that your sentenced be suspended. I order accordingly. Your sentence of 2 months will be suspended for a period of 6 months. However, I order that you are required to serve a total of 30 hours of community service.
22. The substance seized by the police will be destroyed.
23. You have 14 days to appeal this sentence.



DATED at Port Vila this 21<sup>st</sup> day of November 2025  
BY THE COURT



.....  
Hon. Josaia Naigulevu  
Justice

