

## Quick facts

- In December 2013 the Vanuatu Building Act and Code of Practice were successfully passed by Vanuatu Parliament - just two weeks before Christmas and exactly 30 years after it was first drafted.
- James Matariki enrolled in the Certificate III in Plumbing at APTC in 2010 to grow his plumbing business in Port Vila, but after graduating he became more interested in politics, in particular lobbying the government to pass the Vanuatu Building Act and Code of Practice
- James Matariki was President of the APTC Pacific Region Alumni Association and Chair of the Port Vila Vanuatu Alumni Chapter.
- James is a council member of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry and was nominated in February 2014 to represent the Chamber on the National Training Council's new Advisory Board and is a member of the Curriculum Advisory Committee for the TVET Program.
- Construction growth in Vanuatu accelerated from about 7 per cent in 2004 to 25 per cent in 2008 driven by tourism growth, expatriates and locals building houses, and road-building<sup>3</sup>. However this growth slowed in 2011-2012<sup>4</sup>.
- APTC's alumni is encouraging its graduates to use the APTC network of highly skilled tradespeople to generate more local business, given research indicates three times more money stays in the local economy when goods and services are purchased from locally owned businesses rather than large corporate companies<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Pacific Institute of Public Policy, [www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/D10-PiPP.pdf](http://www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/D10-PiPP.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO), <http://www.vns.gov.vu/index.php/17-uncategorised/33-gross-domestic-products-gdp>

<sup>5</sup> 'The Economic Impact of Locally Owned Businesses vs. Chains: A Case Study in Midcoast Maine', September 2003, [www.ilsr.org/economic-impact-locally-owned-businesses-vs-chains-case-study-midcoast-maine/](http://www.ilsr.org/economic-impact-locally-owned-businesses-vs-chains-case-study-midcoast-maine/)



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

CREATING SKILLS FOR LIFE

IMPACT Case Study

# Legislative Change Improves Building Standards



**APTC**  
AUSTRALIA-PACIFIC  
TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
CREATING SKILLS FOR LIFE

APTC Corporate and Student Services Office  
PO Box 10885, Nadi Airport, Fiji Islands  
13 Commercial Street, Namaka, Nadi

Phone: +679 672 87787  
Fax: +679 672 87787  
Email: [enquiries@aptc.edu.au](mailto:enquiries@aptc.edu.au)

[www.aptc.edu.au](http://www.aptc.edu.au)





# Plumber leads national policy change in Vanuatu

An Australia-Pacific Technical College graduate has successfully helped to raise workplace safety standards to an international level in his home country of Vanuatu.

You rarely see the words plumber and politician together in the same sentence, but James Matariki has used his skill as both to drive legislative change for improving building standards in Vanuatu.

Owner of a plumbing business in Vanuatu, James enrolled in the Certificate III in Plumbing at Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC), in Samoa in 2010, to improve his professional skills and to assist him with training his apprentices.

His goals changed midway through his studies at the APTC, when he learnt more about international building standards. In addition to developing his own business, James also saw an opportunity to improve building quality and occupational health and safety standards for the entire industry. Three years on, he has succeeded. In a campaign led by James, the Vanuatu Building Act and Code of Practice (referred to as the Building Act, or generically as the Building Code) was passed by Parliament in December 2013, exactly 30 years after it was first drafted.

"If we want the industry to grow and follow the standards I learnt from APTC, then legislation is needed to be put in place to enforce the standards," James says.

"What was the point of using the Australian standard training when there was no law in place to safeguard me or my customers?"

James believes a national building code with international standards will increase developers' trust in Ni-Vanuatu tradespeople and bolster the ability of local companies to compete for international tenders, especially for larger contracts, and not just for labour and the "small stuff".

James also predicts that this will lead to more fairness across the industry, removing some roadblocks. For example, he says standard international safety terms and conditions mandated by some donor organisation tenders had previously restricted local companies from submitting a proposal.

Being more competitive in the construction sector means local Vanuatu companies can make significant financial gains, with construction a major driver of Vanuatu's gross domestic product (GDP) earnings. Construction growth in Vanuatu accelerated from about 7 per cent in 2004 to 25 per cent in 2008, driven by tourism growth, expatriates and locals building houses, and road-building<sup>1</sup>. A slow growth rate in 2011-2012 indicated a need for greater industry support to ensure ongoing development.

"The government needs to recognise the building industry as having a lot of potential and needing support and legislation," says James.

<sup>1</sup> Fast growth in the Pacific is possible - look at Vanuatu, Pacific Institute of Public Policy, briefing 10 July 2009, by Stephen Howes and Nikunj Son, [www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/D10-PiPP.pdf](http://www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/D10-PiPP.pdf)

He believes that this is important for local businesses to develop and for Ni-Vanuatu tradespeople to become more competitive with large overseas firms.

In terms of competing for international tenders, James is leading by example and, according to his former APTC teacher Bruce Weatherill, he "can now vie for and win those contracts", which is "a massive win for James and Vanuatu".

"As a self-employed plumbing contractor, his APTC qualification and experience gave him the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to win tenders that previously may have been awarded to larger, locally based contracting firms or even international contractors," says Bruce.

James' move into politics and subsequent success, so soon after finishing his course in 2011, comes as no surprise to Bruce, who believes James is capable of many more bigger achievements.

Others at APTC were also impressed by James, and not just by his training achievements, but also by his extracurricular and volunteer activities while completing his APTC studies.

For example, James initiated a program where international students regularly volunteered their skills to help people in local community organisations across Samoa.

James was also actively involved in the APTC Alumni as President of the APTC Pacific Region Alumni Association and Chair of the Port Vila Vanuatu Alumni Chapter. He is a council member of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry representing "small to medium businesses". James was also nominated in February 2014 to represent the Chamber on the National Training Council's new Advisory Board and is a member of the Curriculum Advisory Committee for the TVET Program (Technical Vocational Education and Training).

According to Bruce Weatherill, James was a high achieving student and someone who was always looking for new challenges.

"I'm not sure if it is his gentle nature, his integrity, his commitment to his studies or if it is simply that he is a great person to be around. Whatever it is, he deserves all the accolades," says Bruce.

"He brought many of these endearing qualities with him when he started with APTC, but when he left I felt he had a new sense of self-confidence and purpose."



Plumbing graduates with APTC Samoa Campus Manager, Francis Howes



James excavating and laying pipes during class



Visitation to a project site with fellow APTC graduate

## APTC alumni develops local business

A new campaign by APTC's alumni is encouraging its graduates to take advantage of the APTC network of highly skilled tradespeople to generate more local business.

Research indicates that up to three times more money stays in the local economy when goods and services are purchased from locally owned businesses rather than large corporate companies.<sup>2</sup>

This campaign encourages APTC graduates to better use and promote each other's international-standard services, and supports graduates to open their own businesses.

"If we can encourage that network of APTC graduates, then we can already start to grow businesses and grow standards," says James Matariki, President of the APTC Pacific Region Alumni Association and Chair of the Port Vila Vanuatu Alumni Chapter, who is a driving force behind this initiative.

James also hopes to see more APTC graduates establishing their own businesses and will continue to encourage them to do this.

"Being confident to run your own business is a big thing," explains James. "And often in the Pacific we feel reluctant to take on that responsibility when we actually have the skills."

He says APTC can play a further role in assisting its graduates, especially those keen to open their own business and to develop their management skills.

"If we can help them to manage their own business in the future then that is what I see as being the real long term benefit, beyond having trade skills and moving toward more local employment and locally run companies," says James

James believes that this is all possible as the network already exists.

"We just need to make sure the network is functioning and people start to benefit financially by using each other's work skills."

<sup>2</sup> Source: "The Economic Impact of Locally Owned Businesses vs. Chains: A Case Study in Midcoast Maine", September 2003, <http://www.ilsr.org/economic-impact-locally-owned-businesses-vs-chains-case-study-midcoast-maine/>

## Building Act passed after 30 years

Exactly 30 years after it was first drafted in 1983, the Vanuatu Building Act and Code of Practice were passed by Parliament – just two weeks before Christmas 2013.

APTC Certificate III in Plumbing graduate, James Matariki, was committed to ensuring that the building code was enacted after learning more about international safety and quality standards when he studied at APTC.

Now in politics, James is a council member with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He is using his training with APTC "to help the government get things in order, especially in the building industry", as he believes "no one is hearing the voice of the tradesman".

"This has been a mammoth effort on the part of the building industry and was advocated for and led by James," says Kathryn Gray, APTC Vanuatu Country Manager.

James was elated when he heard that the Act was passed unanimously by both sides of the house.

He believes that "being a tradesman myself and being in the political field", together with his APTC studies, were essential ingredients for his successful campaign to get the Building Act passed.

"APTC has given me a different perspective; I perceive things in a bigger way," James says. "It took me to the next level and it made me change from being another little plumber in town to one who now has Australian-standard certification."

James wants other plumbers and builders in Vanuatu to realise the importance of these standards and he believes that the building code is the first step in achieving this ambition.

He is sure that he is not the only plumber or tradesperson in Vanuatu who will be celebrating the new Building Act as everyone wants to improve standards and quality in the building industry.

"Plumbing is not just the joining up of pipes, it's also about safety and professional standards," says James.