



**Weekly Wire**  
**News from East Asia and Pacific**  
**National Science Foundation**  
**Tokyo Regional Office**  
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**JAPAN: Concern to the Government Notification**

The Executive Board of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ) criticized the notification sent from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to all Japanese national universities, requesting them to take “active steps to abolish or convert human and social science divisions to serve areas that better meet societal needs” (see the WW article on June 30, 2015 at: [http://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/tokyo/articles/WeeklyWire\\_150630.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/tokyo/articles/WeeklyWire_150630.pdf)). The MEXT notice was issued to encourage national universities to develop plans to deal with the decreasing university-age population and the demand for human resources forecasted to occur in the next five years. MEXT does not describe what it means by "societal needs." For example, if a university interprets the need to be "tourism," it is the societal need. MEXT would then expect the university to merge and/or convert its division(s) in social science to focus on tourism. The SCJ Board denounced the notification as groundless and unreasonable. *Source: A summary translation of the SCJ announcement: <http://www.scj.go.jp/en/pdf/kohyo-23-kanji-1e.pdf>; NHK evening news-July 23, 2015; Nikkei article-July 24, 2015; phone interview to MEXT*

**JAPAN: 100-200 Tenured Positions to Young Researchers**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) will establish a new system that will enable 100-200 “excellent researchers” to have tenured positions at universities, companies, and public research institutions in JFY2016. As in the U.S., there is a shortage of tenure-track positions available in Japan. For this reason, many young researchers currently have no other choices but to assume fixed-term positions. To make them feel stable and able to fully devote to their research work without worrying about the next fixed-term positions, MEXT will establish a pool of tenured positions to be offered by universities, companies, and public research institutions. Young researchers will apply for the positions in the pool. After reviewing the researchers, MEXT will match the MEXT-selected “excellent researchers” with the positions in the pool. The research and equipment costs will be provided by MEXT to the research institutions for the first two years, beyond which the research institutions themselves will bear the salaries for the researchers. This new system will be stated in the 5<sup>th</sup> S&T Basic Plan (2015-2020). MEXT will request a JFY2016 budget of Yen 1-1.5 billion yen (\$8-12 million) for this system.

*Source: A summary translation of a Nikkei article-July 27, 2015*

**JAPAN: Gene Editing**

A research group led by Kyoto University and Kinki University succeeded in producing seabream fish that is 1.5-times bigger than the normal size by using gene editing technology. The team leader, Dr. Kinoshita, is certain that the technology will reduce food shortage problems. For example, the U.S. has already produced a cow with the amount of double meat of normal by using the gene editing technology. On the other hand, China’s case of editing the gene of a human embryo has caused ethical problems. To express a concern on the expanding use of the technologies, the U.S. Congress has issued a memo to the DOE, Agriculture Department, NIH and NSF requiring that they cooperate with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) in their

activities for carrying out a gene editing study. Japan's Council for Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (CSTI) has just started discussions on the ethical, legal, and safety questions of the technology.

*Source: NHK news, phone interview to CSTI, and U.S. Congress memo*

### **NEW ZEALAND: The Future of Science**

Should research funding be allocated by lottery? Will we get an 18 month weather forecast? Are private companies going to drive New Zealand's innovation? The country's brightest minds ponder the future of science and answer to questions like these in a special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*. The special issue explores science in New Zealand through a number of different lenses from science funding mechanisms through public engagement and future scenarios of how science could change New Zealand's society.

*Source: <https://www.scimex.org/newsfeed/the-future-of-new-zealand-science>*