Country: Japan

Committee: LEGAL

Agenda Item: Ethics and Legality of Genetic Engineering

Japan is an island country lying off the east coast of Asia. It is the eleventh most populous country in the world, with an estimated population of almost 125 million. Tokyo is the capital and the Greater Tokyo Area is the most populated metropolitan area in the world. Japan is a developed country and a great power. It is a member of numerous international organizations, including the United Nations, G20 and the Group of Seven. Japan’s economy is the world’s third largest by nominal GDP. It has the world’s highest life expectancy.

Japan’s ongoing policy on the matter is to not approve any genetically modified crops to be grown in Japan, however importation of agricultural products made from genetically modified crops, and food made from them are allowed. Genetically modified foods must undergo a safety assessment prior to being awarded certification for distribution to the domestic market. The Food Safety Commission (FSC) performs food and feed safety risk assessments.

Genetic engineering is currently legal in Japan. Japan’s germline gene editing regulations are looser than in most of the world, but still restricted. Germline gene editing is permitted for research only, not for reproductive purposes and clinical testing however violations are not punishable by law. The guidelines also do not regulate doctors at private hospitals who might use gene editing for treatment; they only regulate researchers. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is responsible for regulating germline gene editing. In 2019, the Ministry, reversing an earlier ban, allowed scientists to create animal embryos that contain human cells, and subsequently transplant them into surrogate animals. This research may lead to the development of human-compatible organs. The revised guidelines don’t allow fertilization of human-animal chimeras with human eggs or sperm.