Yesterday the IPCC released its Special Report on Renewable Energy Sources and Climate Change Mitigation (SRREN). To the extent that such a heavily edited and negotiated report contains a bottom line, it seems to be this:

> As infrastructure and energy systems develop, in spite of the complexities, there are few, if any, fundamental technological limits to integrating a portfolio of RE technologies to meet a majority share of total energy demand in locations where suitable RE resources exist or can be supplied. However, the actual rate of integration and the resulting shares of RE will be influenced by factors, such as costs, policies, environmental issues and social aspects.

This quotation is from page 15 of the executive summary, which I have read quickly. Note that the report does *not* say that the transition to RE sources will be painless, cheap, or politically easy. Rather, the point is that there is no *technological* barrier to shifting to RE in a major way:

> Close to 80 percent of the world energy supply could be met by renewables by mid-century if backed by the right enabling public policies.

We can compare this figure to the current estimate of 12.9% of current global energy supply coming from renewables. This is quite a strong statement from an organization that operates by consensus, and thus has to get the approval of nations whose interest in renewable energy sources is small, to say the least:

> Environmentalists said some language favorable to renewables was toned down in all-night wrangling into Monday, partly by OPEC nations led by Saudi Arabia.
>
> “There are all sorts of ‘mights’ and ‘mays’ introduced,” said Jean-Philippe Denruyter, manager of global renewable energy policy for the WWF conservation group. “It’s not a big problem. We are quite positive about the outcome.”

As suggested above, the report does hedge on issues such as cost and administrative feasibility, although it notes that climate mitigating will get more expensive the longer we wait on doing anything. Of course, climate deniers and their allies in Big Oil, Big Coal, and the Republican Party will further delay and deny, and then complain that the costs are too great. No surprise there.

For those in the reality-based community, the report offers a chance to take a global look at the state of renewable energy technology, and for legal scholars, an opportunity to see where implementation bottlenecks exist — and try to break them down.

Question for the day: how much attention to you think that the report will get in the US press? Negative numbers not allowed.