What the Hunter needs is winter of discontent

Fear of others is a poor message to send, writes Peter Oliver.

There will be a federal election this year, the potential is there. For the Hunter, it looms as one of the most boring elections of all time. At least the 1996 Democratic analyst Antony Green, the Coalition needs to win 15 seats to gain office, which requires a uniform swing of only 0.4 per cent. So a change of government remains a possibility, although it is unlikely.

In the Hunter, with its five federal electorates, each sitting MP is a firm favourite to retain office. Sharon Grierson holds Newcastle with a 15.9 per cent buffer and will no doubt celebrate her 10th year as an MP by winning her seat comfortably.

Just down the road, Labor’s star impostor Joel Fitzgibbon holds Charlton with a 129 per cent majority. In Newcastle’s western suburbs, Jill Hall reigns over the Labor fortress of Shortland, protected by a deep 14.7 per cent moat.

But where there might be mild interest is in the Hunter’s two non-metropolitan seats. Bob Baldwin would lose the seat of Paterson with a slender 0.4 per cent voter shift. But, in the absence of a national swing to Labor of any substantial size, attempts by the Blue’s tiller to be looking for a new job. His opposition proposal won’t do him any harm either.

Then there’s Joel Fitzgibbon and the seat of Hunter. Nearly a year ago I prematurely nominated Mr Fitzgibbon as the region’s most significant federal member of all time.

Not long after, Mr Fitzgibbon resigned his job as defense minister after some clumsy office management practices, and amid allegations of improper association with Chinese businesswoman Helen Liu.

These allegations re-emerged last week, with Mr Fitzgibbon aggressively defending his behavior.

But the seat of Hunter is a Labor stronghold with a healthy margin of 13.6 per cent, so whoever fronts for the ALP is a likely victor.

What’s to be done, then, to get a bit of pork trotting across our region amid all this horing certainty? Especially since the smell of salted pig will be a bit scarce as the Government tightens its belt to pay off the stimulus package that so effectively saved Australia’s bacon during the global financial crisis. With such certainty in the Hunter, Labor’s strategists will surely be looking elsewhere to buy votes.

A problem is that the region doesn’t have an immediate crisis with which to attract the feds’ attention. It’s a shame we didn’t stockpile a few shipyards and steelworks from which to attract the feds’ attention. It’s a shame we didn’t stockpile a few shipyards and steelworks from which to attract the feds’ attention. It’s a shame we didn’t stockpile a few shipyards and steelworks from which to attract the feds’ attention. It’s a shame we didn’t stockpile a few shipyards and steelworks from which to attract the feds’ attention.

Mr Albanese manages his workload by relying on others to generate their campaigns. The responsibility is ours. No one is going to do the job for us.

We have an autumn and then a winter to fashion some political discontent, and then devise a plan to resolve it.

Our target should be our comfortable sitting members, with Mr Baldwin heckling from the sideline.

Their collective target should be Mr Albanese. Give the busy lad something exciting to fund. Like other regions around Australia are already doing.

Professor Phillip O’Neill is director of the urban research centre at the University of Western Sydney.