



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Melby, manatee rescued from a storm drain in Melbourne Beach, returns to Florida waters after rehabilitation at SeaWorld Orlando

Adolescent manatee rescued by huge community effort is now back home

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Photo: SeaWorld Orlando

ORLANDO, Fla. (April 7, 2026) – SeaWorld Orlando, in partnership with local and state officials, successfully returned the manatee known as “Melby” to the wild in the Indian River Lagoon near Ballard Park today, after he was rescued from a storm drain in Melbourne Beach, Fla., in early February.

The return drew a crowd of local officials, community members and supporters, including those involved in Melby’s rescue, who gathered to watch his return to the wild. The manatee’s name, “Melby,” was given by the community and later adopted by SeaWorld.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and SeaWorld Rescue veterinarians deemed Melby releasable based on his health and weight and collaborated on the timing and location of the release. Since he was brought to SeaWorld’s rescue facility, he was housed in one of the facility’s rescue pools, given medical care and rehabilitated, along with gaining over 100 pounds on a diet of romaine lettuce and reaching a healthy weight of 515 pounds.

“The goal with every rescue is to rehabilitate animals and help them regain their health and thrive so they can return to their native environment, and that is exactly what is happening with Melby,” said Brant Gabriel, vice president of zoological operations at SeaWorld Orlando. “It’s also inspiring to see the community come together to support his rescue, rehabilitation and return. We are so happy that Melby has made such strong progress and is now back in his home waters.”

Melby captivated the hearts of many and drew national attention when he was discovered in Melbourne Beach on February 9, 2026. By chance, Melbourne Beach Public Works crews inspecting a storm drain discovered the manatee trapped in a stormwater junction box, cold-stressed, underweight and unable to escape. It was unclear how long he had been trapped. His rescue came during a period when manatees across Florida were impacted by colder water temperatures, prompting increased rescue efforts statewide.

The community quickly came together to save him, with assistance from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Manatee Rescue, the University of Florida and Brevard County Fire Rescue, Melbourne Beach Fire Rescue, Public Works and Police, along with a local towing company. Together they broke open the roadway, removed the storm drain cover and carefully lifted Melby to safety as local residents watched and cheered.

Melby was transported by the Manatee Rescue Program to SeaWorld Orlando late in the evening for rehabilitation. Over the past two months, SeaWorld’s veterinary teams stabilized him, treated him for cold stress and helped him to regain weight.

“From the moment Melby arrived, we knew his case was special, not just because of how he was rescued, but because of how many people were rooting for him,” said Dr. Lydia Staggs, SeaWorld Orlando senior staff veterinarian. “Watching him regain strength each day and now return to the wild is exactly why we do this work.”

For many in the Melbourne Beach community who witnessed his dramatic rescue, today’s return marks a full-circle moment as Melby returns home to the waters where his story first began. SeaWorld Orlando operates the largest manatee critical care facility in the country, playing a vital role in rescuing, rehabilitating, and returning injured manatees back to Florida’s waterways. So far this year, SeaWorld Orlando has rescued 21 manatees, bringing its total to 1,078 manatees rescued and contributing to a company-wide total of 1,081 manatees rescued since 1976.

Every visit to a SeaWorld park helps support animal rescue, conservation, and research efforts that protect animals both in its parks and in the wild, helping make stories like Melby’s possible.

About SeaWorld

SeaWorld is a leading marine life theme park and accredited zoo and aquarium that provides experiences that matter while educating and inspiring guests of all ages to care about marine life. Welcoming millions of guests every year, the parks offer fun and enriching experiences from up-close animal encounters and year-round educational programs to award-winning marine-life-themed rides and attractions, special events, and exciting

entertainment. For more than 60 years SeaWorld has advanced the conservation of marine life in and outside its parks through science, education, and exceptional animal care that is Humane Certified by American Humane and accredited by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. SeaWorld is one of the largest marine animal rescue organizations in the world, helping more than 42,000 animals to date. The [SeaWorld Conservation Fund](#), a non-profit foundation established in 2003, has provided more than \$20 million to nearly 1,400 organizations to advance critical research on every continent. A portion of park proceeds goes toward supporting these longstanding conservation commitments. SeaWorld parks are in Orlando, San Antonio, San Diego, and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). SeaWorld is part of the United Parks & Resorts Inc. (NYSE:PRKS) portfolio of theme park brands. For more information, visit us at [SeaWorld.com](#).

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